I Do Wander Everywhere

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I Do Wander Everywhere

by mokuyoubi

Summary

It's something he could always do, as far back as he can remember. The first time that really stood out in his mind, he was six and his father was angry. Will did it without thought, running down the hall, trying to calm his wild heart and rapid breathing. His father's footsteps heavy behind him.
In the end his father had dragged him out from the bed. "Never again," he'd said, holding Will tight enough to leave bruises on his arms. "Your mother's gone and I won't have that under my roof."

Canon Divergence from Takiawase. Using his ability to become invisible, Will beats Beverly to Hannibal's house, but his reckoning soon takes on an entirely different shape than what he'd originally intended...
Inspired by this tumblr post

Notes

Rating is for the entirety of the fic.

Though I am hesitant to post a WIP, given my general anxiety over demands for updates, I'm going ahead with this one. I have the entire thing plotted out in great detail, and I know it will be finished, so I can post it with confidence that you won't be let down by a WIP.

HOWEVER, I want to be clear that the updates might not always be regular. As mentioned, I am working on a lot of fics, some of them collaborations, and a couple with deadlines. This fic is the one I turn to when I'm overwhelmed by the others, or hit by writer's block because it is so much fun for me to write, but that means it isn't my main priority right now. Please be patient with me on this! Thanks for your understanding!

Chapter 1

It's something he could always do, as far back as he can remember. The first time that really stood out in his mind, he was six and his father was angry. Will did it without thought, running down the hall, trying to calm his wild heart and rapid breathing. His father's footsteps heavy behind him.

In the end his father had dragged him out from the bed. "Never again," he'd said, holding Will tight enough to leave bruises on his arms. "Your mother's gone and I won't have that under my roof."

After that, he hadn't used it for years, save in the privacy of his own room, just to remind himself he could. But it's been over a decade since he's thought about it at all. At times he's wondered if maybe it was all in his head, like an imaginary friend that seems so real until you ask you parents whatever happened to that friend you had in second grade, and they laughingly explain that friend existed only in your mind.

Current circumstances have only served to drive home just how out of touch Will's mind is from reality. Though the medications he's taking to treat the encephalitis have mostly banished the hallucinations, some things persist. The clicking of hooves on the stone floor late at night. Lecter's eyes black, soulless, and demonic, tar spilling from his smiling mouth, haunting Will's dreams. And this.

As much as the nightmares, it keeps him up at night. Thoughts of what he could do if it *were* true. No one else believes him about Lecter. Everyone he thought cared for him has abandoned him in favour of the good doctor. If they aren't going to find the evidence and put him away where he belongs, Will could do it.

Sneak out at night, after the last cell check. Break into Lecter's home. Leave the evidence on Jack's doorstep and be back in his cell before dawn. No one would be able connect it back to Will. They'd come rushing in to find him just where they'd left him, and they wouldn't be able to ignore the proof he'd found.

He lies awake imagining it. Watches it play out like a fantasy behind his eyelids, but never truly considering it as a possibility. It's just a way to cope. Then Beverly comes to visit, and she offers a *real* opportunity to bring Hannibal to justice, and Will casts these thoughts aside,

Until...

"Sutures were hidden under the stitching that wove him into the mural. One crime made to look like another." Beverly says, and it all coalesces.

Like the Copycat. And the Chesapeake Ripper. He means to say it outloud, but his mind is racing too fast, putting together all the pieces.

The kidneys were no doubt surgically removed.

Doctor Lecter was a surgeon.

He's keeping the organs as a trophy, but what is he doing with them?

The images flash before his eyes. Of Cassie Boyle laid out in that field, skewered on the antlers of the stag head, the birds pecking at her remains. Before he has time really process what he's seeing, he's at the table in his hotel room, taking his first bite of sausage as Hannibal watches, smiling in approbation.

He's eating them. Horror sweeps through him, prickling cold down his spine. His stomach heaves, bile rising up in his throat, and he swallows it back. *I've been eating them, too. We all have.*

Beverly watches him, concern warring with mistrust and fear. She's gone out on a limb for him, and he's selfishly led her straight into the lion's den. No more. He's not going to have Beverly ending up on Hannibal's plate.

Will shakes his head. "Will?" Beverly reaches out, hesitating before she finally touches him, laying her hand over his wrist. Some of the tension in Will's frame relaxes; it seems like ages since anyone other than one of the guards has touched him, and Beverly's touch has always been one of the few he's welcomed. Warm and kind, with no expectation of reciprocation--only a desire to express fondness.

And Will could have gotten her killed. That, more that his realisation settles heavy as a stone in his gut.

"I was wrong," he says, barely more than a whisper.

Beverly leans forward. "About what?" she whispers back.

"Hannibal," Will says, and the lies cling at the back of his throat, choking him as he forms them on his tongue, forces them past his lips. "I was wrong about him."

"What do you mean?" Beverly asks. Her face is screwed up in confusion bordering on disbelief.

"Look, Beverly, we have to let this go."

"Are you kidding me?" Beverly hisses. "After twisting my arm to get me to do this for you? Now that you've got me doing your investigation for you? He has to know I'm suspicious of him, at this point."

"Just stop," Will says, urgent. "Don't go near him again, leave it alone."

Beverly just stares at him as if he's sprouted a second head. "You said no one believed you. Well *I do*. He was toying with me--he's the one who suggested I look along the stitches."

Will shakes his head again. "I would have suggested it too, if I'd been there."

"Seriously, what the hell?" Beverly demands. "Where is this even coming from?"

The Copycat is dangerous enough, but with the knowledge that Lecter is the Chesapeake Ripper, comes the realisation that he could have been killing in a variety of ways attributed to different killers over the years. Who knows how high his body count, or the lengths to which he'll go to avoid being caught?

Beverly still doesn't want to tell Jack; she'll keep pursuing this herself, and Hannibal will kill her without a second thought or a hint of remorse. Will has to handle this himself.

"Listen, I can't explain it, but it doesn't add up, something's missing," Will says. "Please, Beverly, you've trusted me this far, trust me now."

"Will, if it's not him…"

Will feels her pity, and his hackles rise, though he fights to maintain a neutral expression.

"I know," he says. "If it's not him, who else is there, besides me?"

Beverly's face says it all.

Will reaches for her hand again and she doesn't draw away. It's a small comfort. "Promise me," he says, locking his eyes onto hers. "*Promise me* you'll let this go."

"Will." Beverly's tone is lost. She lifts a helpless hand through the air.

"Please," Will says, putting all his desperation and fear behind the word, letting her see it in his eyes. She crumples in the face of it.

"Fine," she says at last, squeezing his hand back. "I promise."

That night, Will practices after lights out, sitting cross-legged on his bed. Eyes closed, breathing calm and slow, Will focusses, trying to recapture the feeling as he remembers it. The odd, leaden numbness in his limbs. Cold rippling over his skin, ebbing and swelling, like the tide coming in, until it swallows him whole.

When Will blinks his eyes open, everything is clearer. He moves slowly, glancing down, and to his amazement, his uniform is nothing more than an empty shell, holding form around seeming nothingness. Carefully, Will rises to his feet and goes to the mirror, inspecting his lack of reflection.

Of course, it occurs to him, he could be hallucinating right now. There's only one way to find out. During his last session with Chilton he snagged the key card to his cell. The man was so busy congratulating himself on his skill as a therapist he didn't notice a thing.

So there's nothing to lose. The longer he stays invisible, the easier it is to maintain. A reflex he'd forgotten to use. Now it doesn't take any real effort at all. He strips down, stuffs his uniform with pillows and towels and shoves it under the covers, and makes his escape.

Part of him isn't sure it would actually work until he walks right past the night guard sitting at the bank of monitors with his coffee and crossword puzzle. The man looks up, curious, at

the whining protest of the squeaky hinges on the gate. He shrugs after a moment. Will lets out the breath he's been holding, passes over the threshold, and is home free.

It's close to midnight when Will finally arrives at Lecter's home. There's a bus station less than a ten minute walk from the hospital, and he manages to slip on with a waitress leaving her shift. Certainly it's a more circuitous path than he'd prefer, but by getting off whenever the last occupant does, and waiting for another rider, he cuts his way across Baltimore towards his destination.

The windows are black, and Will has the inkling that the house is unoccupied at the moment, though there is no particular indication of that. He goes in through the backdoor, picking the lock, and has a moment of dizzying disbelief that he's standing here again, in this kitchen, after all that has come to pass.

Immaculate as always, everything in its proper place, Will can almost imagine Lecter moving around this space in that effortless way of his. Smiling at Will across the island as he adds the final touches to a meal. His stomach rebels at the thought. For a moment he's bent over the counter, clinging to the edge, swept by a wave of dizziness and nausea.

Breakdown later, Graham. It sounds remarkably like Beverly's voice chastising him, which just stung. *Get the evidence and get the hell out*.

The refrigerator is pristine and fussily organised. There's no trace of meat, human or otherwise. Of course, Will wouldn't expect him to keep it out in the open. Hannibal has been careful.

A faint rattling noise comes from the backdoor, and Will freezes, heart racing. He slams the fridge shut. On tip toes he makes his way to the window over the sink, twitching back the curtain just enough to see Beverly's hair shining in the moonlight, penlight caught between her lips as she fiddles with the lockpick.

"Fuck." Will sighs and goes to the door, waiting just inside. He only has two real options here--he can't let her inside. So either he reveals himself to her, and takes the chance that she drags him back to the hospital, or…

The French door swings open, and Will braces himself. He waits until Beverly starts to step over the threshold before he rushes forward, hands on her shoulders, pushing her back out with the full weight of his body behind it.

Beverly cries out in shock and pain, stumbling on the back step and landing hard on her ass on the ground. She stares at the open door, empty as far as she can see. Will follows her out, stepping heavy so she can hear him coming, and he crouches down at her side, leaning in until his breath stirs her hair. She's trembling, eyes wide.

Will can feel her shaky fear, but stronger than that, her courage, and Will realises if he hadn't come tonight, all of that would have been lost, forever. He can't risk her coming back. "Stay away from Hannibal Lecter," he growls in her ear, pitched low enough to disguise his voice.

Beverly scrambles to her feet, snatching her penlight from where it fell on the grass. She sweeps the light back and forth over the yard, but the golden glow passes right through Will. “Who’s there?” she demands, and her voice doesn’t even shake.

Will grabs her arm, hard, and drags her towards the back gate. She struggles all the way, getting in a solid blow to his jaw. Her nails rake down his neck and across his chest, hard enough to draw blood. Will stops moving, taking her free wrist and shoving her back against the fence.

“You made a promise, Beverly,” he snarls. Beverly’s jaw drops, eyes darting side to side in utter disbelief, but of course there’s nothing to be seen. “Now go, and don’t come back.”

She hesitates, even as he opens the gate, looking between it and the open backdoor, clearly torn. Then she goes, crossing over to the alley behind the house. “Crazy must be catching,” she says, and Will slams the gate in her face.

Back inside, he’s shaking with unspent adrenaline and the knowledge of what might have happened if he hadn’t come tonight. He locks up the back door and drinks water directly from the faucet until his heart no longer feels like it might beat out of his chest.

Sweat clings to the ends of his hair, invisible until it drips free, then splashing solid against the countertop. He smears a finger through it and runs his hand back through his hair, straightens his shoulders, and gets back to work.

There’s another fridge in the pantry. Will’s seen Hannibal retrieve ingredients from it before. Good a place as any to continue his search. It’s locked, too, and Will feels a dark grin curve his lips. This is it.

Inside the room is illuminated by the light from the glass-front refrigerator. Will can see the vacuum-packed meats in a variety of cuts within. He slides the door open, shuffling through the sealed packages, until he finds them. Two kidneys.

Will releases a breath he hadn’t realised he’d been holding.

There was always the possibility that it was him all along. That he’d projected his own actions on Hannibal. That he’d created false memories to cope with what he’d done. But no. Here’s the proof.

Outside he hears the sound of a garage door opening--the converted shed in the backyard. He grabs one of the bags and turns, sweeping a paper pouch off the counter. Thyme sprigs spill out and scatter across the floor.

The engine turns off. The garage door sounds again. Will skids to his knees, ignoring the burn, and scoops the thyme towards him. His breath is coming too fast and his head his spinning. He has no idea if he’ll remain invisible if he passes out. Struggling to get his breathing under control, he brushes the thyme back into the envelope and folds it, haphazard.

Then, scrambling to his feet, he shoves the kidney’s back in the fridge and runs back into the kitchen. The pantry door slams behind him just as Hannibal turns the key in the door.

It is surreal, watching Hannibal in an unguarded moment, walking into his home with the expectation of it's emptiness. There is an expression of on his face, difficult for Will to place at first. Something akin to sadness and regret. Will almost snorts at the idea that Hannibal is capable of anything of the like, and claps his hand over his mouth, holding his breath.

Hannibal closes the door, locks it behind himself, and turns to face the room at large. He pauses in the motion of taking off his gloves, head tilting to the side in a moment of confusion. Recognition bleeds over his face--faint curl of his lip and widening of his eyes--chased quickly by disbelief. He closes his eyes, draws in a deep breath through his nose and holds it a moment, then lets it out with a long sigh.

Opening his eyes, he takes in the room, seeking anything out of place. His hand drags along the counter by the sink and then turns towards the pantry. For a moment frozen in time, Will is certain Hannibal sees him. Certainly he must hear the pounding of his heart, or his uneven breath?

Purposefully, Hannibal strides across the room, heading straight for Will's position, and Will sidesteps out of the way of the door just as Hannibal reaches for the handle.

It's unlocked. Of course.

Will bites his tongue against the automatic curse that wants to slip free. Hannibal pushes through, now alert, gaze sweeping over the pantry. A stray sprig of thyme crunches underfoot, and Hannibal bends, running his fingers along the wood grain and bringing the crushed thyme to his nose. A line furrows between his brows.

Standing, he goes to the refrigerator. Will threw the kidneys back in haphazardly, and there's no denying that Hannibal notices it at once. But he goes through the contents, and finding nothing missing, slides the door closed again.

For an impossibly long moment, Hannibal stands there, still as a statue, and Will waits, vision spotting black and white around the edges. Then Hannibal turns and leaves the room, locking it from inside and pulling the door closed.

Will waits until he's moved on to the hallway then starts for the backdoor--he'll have to come back another evening. It's too risky now. But he stops with his hand on the knob.

This is a unique opportunity to see Hannibal unaware he has an outside observer. Will's curiosity overpowers common sense. The tease of possibility, the chance of that mask slipping, affording Will a glimpse of what lies beneath, is too much to resist.

He releases the door knob and follows Hannibal through the dining room.

Even invisible Will leaves his mark on the world around him. The sounds he makes aren't muffled. He has to take special care with his movements so as not to draw attention. He traces Hannibal's path through the house by the trail of lights, through the hall and the front parlour, into the comparatively cosy study at the far end of the house.

Hannibal has discarded his outer layers, and when Will cautiously makes his way into the room, he is fascinated by what he sees. Hannibal with his tie hanging uneven around his neck, top two buttons undone, hair falling loose in his eyes. He goes to the bar stand in the corner and fills a glass with scotch, throws back half of it, and chuckles ruefully to himself.

As Will watches, Hannibal goes to stand before the cold fireplace, elbow resting on the mantle. It's almost impossible for Will to know what's going on inside his mind. After all, that's how Hannibal flew beneath his radar for so long--all of his reactions are so tightly controlled, so internalised, very little of it ever makes his way to his face.

Nonetheless, Will is captivated by what he does see. No one else would be able to read it in the subtle workings of Hannibal's face. The way his jaw works before setting stiff and resolutely jutted forward. His gaze, unfocussed and distant--seeing someone that is no longer there.

It's an aching loneliness that feels like staring into a mirror, that makes Will want to reach out and touch, tracing his fingers along the lines of Hannibal's face. Regret that cuts so deeply Will feels the sting acutely in his breastbone, and has to pause to wonder which of them is actually experiencing it.

He could go back now and get the kidneys. He could still go through with his plan and come morning Jack would be on Hannibal's doorstep with a warrant.

Yet for some reason, Will finds himself slipping out the back door and beginning his long trek back to the hospital, empty handed.

Tomorrow night, he tells himself, and almost believes it.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The throb in Hannibal's cheek isn't particularly bothersome. He's suffered far worse injuries over the years, but as he drives home he finds himself testing the sting, shifting the muscles of his face to feel it more acutely.

There was real force behind Bella's blow, and Hannibal finds that pleases him. Though he'd left her fate to the toss of a coin, the vigor with which she responded to his betrayal leads him to believe it was the right course of action. She may hate him for it, but there remains too much life in her failing body to have tossed it away prematurely.

These thoughts, Bella's actions, are a welcoming distraction to those which have obsessively preoccupied his mind of late. Only made worse by his visit to the hospital this morning where he was summarily dismissed by Frederick Chilton, of all the indignities. He knew the olive branch Will extended was nothing more than a ploy--another step towards his promised retribution--but Hannibal had truly not anticipated this particular turn of events.

Just like that, and all his mental restraint, all his hard earned control amounts to nothing, where Will Graham is concerned. Unbidden and unwelcome, he intrudes upon the order of Hannibal's mind, tossing his jacket on the floor of his memory palace and striding through the halls without pity or remorse. Flinging open doors and rearranging the furnishings, knocking the frames askew.

At the back door Hannibal pauses, shaken free from his reverie by a patch of torn and flattened grass. A streak of mud on the stoop. The neighbour's dog has the habit of slipping it's leash and coming under his gate to dig in his garden. Unfortunate that circumstance prevents him from addressing such rude behaviour, but one cannot strike so close to home.

Still...He turns the key in the lock, cutis anserina rising up along the back of his neck causing the vellus hair to stand erect. It is a singularly intriguing sensation, one with which he is largely unfamiliar. That does not mean he will not yield to its warning. He pushes through the door and locks it behind him, ready for whatever awaits him.

It is nothing he could have anticipated. After Ms. Katz's inelegant fumbling in the morgue, some clandestine investigation from that quarter was in fact to be expected. What he smells, however, is not the clean, vaguely antiseptic scent of Beverly Katz, nitrile and cornstarch. What he smells is the metallic tang of sweat and fear, crisp cool water through stone and silt. The earthy, smoky burn, thick and pungent on the air.

Hannibal closes his eyes and breathes it in. A combination blended together with body heat and coalescing in scent as unique as a fingerprint and painfully familiar. A scent that has only recently begun to fade from his office and his home.

Guilt is a most intriguing emotion, playing tricks on his mind. Hannibal welcomes it, if only for the novelty of the experience, but it is disconcerting. These physical traces of Will echo through the hallways of his memory palace with the same clumsiness and brute force as Hannibal's mental construct of him.

Hannibal dismisses the wandering train of thought and opens his eyes. He might be imagining Will's scent, but something is not quite right here. Droplets of water in the sink basin, a streak on the otherwise pristine surface of the counter. Hannibal runs his finger along the stainless steel.

The door to the pantry is unlocked. The position of the handle is slightly off, not entirely latched. He can see it from the sliver of light coming through the gap in the doorframe.

Within the pantry, Will's scent is overwhelmed by that of dried herbs and truffles, the thyme crushed under the heel of his shoe. He crouches, pinches a bit of it and rolls it between his fingers, further releasing the fragrance in the air. It's the orange thyme he took a clipping of from the conservatory. The envelope is still on the counter.

It's possible some of the clippings fell loose without his noticing it. Possible that with his mind so consumed by thoughts of Will, distracted by Ms. Katz's leading questions, laden with Bella's burdens, he failed to pull the pantry door closed entirely. Nothing is missing. If someone came looking for evidence, they left empty handed.

He makes a point of locking the door on his way out and pulling it closed until he hears the click, then makes his way to the study. Tonight he goes for the scotch--it seems appropriate, his thoughts intent to dwell on Will Graham--and leaves the fire unlit--it suits his mood.

Though Will never occupied this space, Hannibal's home feels emptier now. Or perhaps it would be more precise to say to say his whole existence if emptier now. The distractions provided by Bella and the FBI ring hollow in comparison to his conversations with Will, brick by brick dismantling the walls he'd spent a lifetime constructing.

It is unfortunate that Abigail forced his hand in this manner. It is unfortunate that things fell out the way they did. To say that Hannibal had a clear plan in all of this would be untrue, but there was a general path he'd traced out for Will to follow, and he hadn't intended for it to lead to Will's imprisonment.

If only he could lock away thoughts of Will Graham as easily as the man himself…

The scotch burns on the way down, warming him from the inside out. His cheek aches as he swallows and Hannibal chuckles at the memory of Bella's face in the moment she struck him. The fire licking behind her eyes.

Once again the hair on the back of his neck prickles. He is struck with the impression that he is not alone in the room, though there is nowhere for anyone to hide. Yet years of carefully honing his instincts have yet to fail him.

Hannibal can sense it, in the currents of the air, the particles of dead skin and dust eddying in the otherwise stillness of the room. The very house seems to respire, just out of step with

Hannibal's own breathing. Intriguing, if unsettling, the gust of air the trails across the room, as if someone has just left, and as it goes, so fades Will's scent.

Fitting, that it's Will haunting him. He tips his glass to the ghost and throws back the rest of his scotch.

*

The downstairs is empty when Will lets himself in, the only light glowing dimly in the foyer. Will follows the soft creaks and and moans of the old house up the stairs, cringing when the fourth one squeaks in protest. He falls still, but after several long seconds there is no reaction from upstairs, and so he continues on.

Hannibal's bedroom door is ajar and Will squeezes inside. It's as orderly a room as every other in his home--more like a museum exhibit than anything lived in. From the en suite comes the sound of running water shutting off, then he comes into the room, silk pajama pants and no shirt.

Once Will might have been surprised to find the lithe, muscular body Hannibal keeps hidden beneath his bulky suits. Now, knowing of his extracurricular activities, it makes sense that he's in shape. Apex predator has to be able to take on all comers.

Likely he isn't prepared for the invisible ones, at least.

Will clutches the scalpel in his hand tightly, finger braced along the blunt edge of the blade. It's visible, of course. He used to play with the limitations of his ability as a child and quickly learned that if it wasn't a part of his body, it could be seen. He holds it low at his side, stays in the shadows where it won't catch on the light.

Hannibal moves around his room, putting things in order, going into his closet. Will follows, waiting to strike until he's reentered the bedroom. Hannibal has the upper hand as far as strength and size go. But with him unaware, and unable to see his opponent, Will might stand a chance.

He lunges and catches Hannibal around his waist, sending him sprawling out on the bed. Will climbs up after him, straddling his legs and there's a brief struggle. Hannibal surges upward, teeth bared in a snarl, but something stops him. He goes completely still, eyes darting back and forth over the place where Will's face would be, if he were visible.

For a moment Will panics, but no, he's still invisible. And yet beneath him, all the fight leaves Hannibal. He relaxes back against the bed by increments. His arms drop to the mattress and he glances at the scalpel floating midair, "Go on, then," he says, voice calm. "Take your pound of flesh."

Will hesitates, hand drawn back to strike, uncertain now that the moment is upon him. There's a challenge in Hannibal's eyes--a question, and Will isn't certain he knows the right answer. He barely flinches when Will swipes across his cheek. Bright blood blooms in a thin line along his skin and Hannibal hisses.

Transfixed by the sight, Will traces the wound, gathering a drop of blood on his fingertip. It hangs suspended in the air, seemingly from nothing, before Will brings it to his mouth. He does it almost entirely without thought, but it sparks something inside. Arousal flares hot and insistent in his chest.

He brings down the scalpel again. A matching gash for his other cheek. The blood spills down Hannibal's face, beading along his jawline, running into his hair. He offers no resistance as Will cuts him again and again. Down the long column of his neck as his Adam's apple works through a swallow. Over his collarbone and chest. None of them deep enough to do any permanent damage and Hannibal is open and willing to meet his fate at Will's hand, this is the perfect opportunity, and yet...

Will is hard. He can feel the answering press of Hannibal's erection against his ass and grinds back against, shocking a gasp from them both. His hand goes slack on the scalpel when Hannibal rolls his hips. Will's head drops back on a low moan and braces his hand on the bloody mess of his chest, slipping and catching with his nails digging into skin.

Hannibal bares his teeth at Will again, this time in a fierce smile. "You don't have it in you," he says.

Growling, even if Hannibal can't see it, Will brings the scalpel up under his chin, tight against his jugular. "I thought the whole point of your game is that I *do* have it in me."

"But you don't want me dead," Hannibal says. "Now I'm finally interesting."

It's true. It's the unavoidable, painful truth. He had the chance to kill Hannibal, more than once. In Hannibal's office, on the car ride to the Hobb's house, before Jack showed up and intervened. And now, in his home *twice*, and he hasn't taken it.

Hannibal jerks him close and they meet in a violent clash of lips and teeth. Will groans into his mouth and gives over to it. Lets Hannibal roll him to his back. Splays his legs open wide for Hannibal to settle between them, grinding down hard and fast.

There's a sharp rapping sound, and Will opens his eyes to find Frederick Chilton staring at him through the bars of his cage. It's disconcerting, to say the least, and Will has experienced more than his fair share of disconcerting moments in his life.

Chilton watches with a keen edge to the look on his face, brows swept down, deep in thought. Will can read the suspicion, a faint glimmer of an idea beginning to form behind his eyes, thinking he's on the verge of unravelling all of Will's secrets. No doubt some pedestrian supposition in comparison to truth.

"You have a visitor." Will sits up on his cot, heart caught in his throat at the possibility it might be Lecter. He's unprepared for such a thing, after seeing him last night. After that disturbingly realistic dream... "Beverly Katz is here to see you."

"Great." Will rubs his eyes and clutches his blanket in his lap. Chilton is still watching him like he's the crowning jewel of the zoo. "Can I take a piss?" he snaps, raising his brows.

Finally Chilton lets his cane drop from where it's rested against the bars, and saunters away. Will waits until he's out of sight and presses the heel of his hand hard against his cock. He's still on edge from the dream, but it's hardly the time for indulging in such things.

A few centring breaths and he gets up and begins to dress, pulling his jumpsuit on over the grey undershirt and boxers. By the time he washes his face and runs his damp hands through his hair, taming the curls, his erection has thankfully flagged. He examines his reflection in the mirror--the faint shadow of a bruise on his cheek and the three scratches on his neck.

Tugging up the collar, he goes to the door, stands with his back to the bars and calls out for Chilton. It's Brown who puts him in the cuffs and leads him to the interview room. His touch lingers unnecessarily on Will's hands as he links the chain through the bolt on the table, and he leaves the room with a lopsided smile shot in Will's direction.

Will is distracted from that by the expression on Beverly's face as she takes him in. Her eyes track over the bruise she gave him and linger on his neck, though his collar hides that evidence.

"How's it going, Will?" she asks, voice purposefully flat to cover to the rush of adrenaline she's feeling. Mounting excitement at the idea of having her theory confirmed. "Go anywhere interesting last night?"

Will smiles his most disarming smile and gives a sharp, pointed tug on the chains binding his wrists together. "Where would I go?" He leans forward, finger beckoning conspiratorily. "How about you. Were you somewhere you shouldn't have been?"

"I knew it," Beverly says, voice barely more than exhalation. She leans forward to meet him, their faces close enough he can smell the coffee on her breath.

Outside the room, Brown taps his keys against the glass and gestures them apart. Will obligingly sits back.

"What were you *thinking?*" Beverly hisses. "If he'd found you--if someone saw you?"

"Saw me?" Will echoes guilelessly. "Beverly, I was here in my cell all night. Just check the cameras."

There's still some lingering doubt in her, something frozen between delight and fear. The part of her that knows what she experienced up against the rules she's lived her entire life by. She's a scientist, after all, and she goes where the facts lead her, but what happens when the conclusion she reaches is beyond scientific explanation?

Beverly's hand shoots out and he dodges backwards, but not quickly enough. Her fist closes around his collar and her eyes light up at what she sees. Brown is shouting something through the glass, but Will can't hear it over the roaring in his ears. This is the closest anyone has come to knowing his secret, outside of his parents, and it's paralysing.

"All I have to do is test the skin under my nails."

“With what resources? And to what end?” Will challenges. “How would *you* explain where you were last night? Without a warrant, without just cause. Just *leave it alone*, please.”

Brown finally gets the door unlocked and separates them, peeling Beverly’s fingers from Will’s jumpsuit. “No physical contact with the prisoner. Ma’am, I’m going to have to ask you to leave now.”

“Beverly, do I need to remind you again that you made a promise?” He leans in to whisper in her ear, face hidden by the curtain of her hair, and surprisingly, Brown allows it. “Leave Lecter to me.”

Beverly stands back, shaken and victorious and confused as hell. It’s the closest thing to a confirmation she’s going to get from him, and they both know it. Her eyes search his face, and she must see what it is she’s looking for.

“If there are any more bodies, I’m going to Jack with the file on him.”

Will nods his emphatic agreement. “Fine, yes, take it to Jack, if you have to. But no more late night visits.”

Brown is visibly agitated on the trip back to the cell. Maybe worried Chilton’s going to find out what happened and write him up for allowing it. “Don’t worry,” Will tells him in an undertone, “Beverly’s not going to report you.”

After he’s locked in the cell, he turns to meet Brown’s eyes, and *oh* that’s interesting. There’s something lurking there, vigilant and predatory. The stark lighting casts eerie shadows over the planes of his face. When he catches Will staring, he stops in the process of turning away, turning to face Will more fully instead.

Staring into those strange, almost alien eyes, Will sees it all playing out. His eyes flutter closed, and there’s Sykes in a darkened room, greeting him like a friend. Will’s own hand lifts, finger on the trigger of a gun. A single shot, and then he’s hefting Sykes onto the antlers. Will can feel Brown’s impressive strength as if it’s his own. He watches himself performing the rest--the smile, the ear, the rigging of the fire…

Though he speaks in hushed tones, Will chooses his words carefully. “I want to thank you for all you’ve done for me.”

Brown casts a look to either side, and then leans back in. “Jerking you around like a dog on a chain? Bringing you crap food?” he asks, brow cocked in amused disbelief. “ I could probably slip in something a little more palatable. Or some reading material, maybe?”

“I have my imagination.”

“And what do you see with that?”

“Someone who’s different. Someone others might call crazy, because they don’t understand. They don’t know better.”

“That’s very insightful. But then I suppose I shouldn’t expect anything less from the FBI’s star profiler.” Brown raps on the bars once and gives Will a twinkling smile. “You let me know if there’s anything I can do for you, Mister Graham.”

Then he goes back the way he came, whistling and jingling his keys.

“Odd bird, that one,” Abel drawls, from the next cell over.

Will watches Brown go and hums his agreement. A bird of prey.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for your lovely comments and your patience!

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will doesn't spare any thoughts for Brown once headcount is completed and the lights are out. Gideon tries to strike up a conversation and Will stalwartly ignores him until he eventually gives it up, only after droning on and on for what seems like hours. The man really likes the sound of his voice, so at least that's one of them.

Slipping out is even easier than before. Will's confidence in his ability has grown, now that he's tested it. Tonight he's too impatient to take the busses. He puts to use all the skills he picked up growing up always on the wrong side of the tracks and hotwires a car from a few blocks away in an overnight lot. No one will notice it missing until tomorrow, and by then he'll have it back in place.

Lights out is early for the crazies. He makes it to Lecter's house just before ten with one brief stop on the way--still early for the good doctor. It is still astonishing to Will just how he's able to accomplish the things he does, on seemingly no sleep. His Victorian attitude regarding when food is served means dinner doesn't often begin until nine at night.

On more than one occasion Will has lingered well past two in the morning after dinner, dessert, and coffee. How Lecter then went on to hunt his victims, erect his elaborate tableaux, and still look refreshed and impeccably put together the next day is a mystery beyond Will's imagining.

There is no one at Hannibal's table tonight, when Will peeks in through the french doors leading to the dining room. The table is empty save the centerpiece. He lets himself in that way--the doors are predictably unlocked, as Will has noted Hannibal leaves them, when at home.

A glance into the kitchen confirms that Hannibal is there, washing the evening's dishes. Will pauses for a moment in the doorway to watch. His movements are efficient, methodical, and automatic. In just his crisp white button down, sleeves rolled up to his elbows, hair fallen flat from the activities of the day and the heat of the dishwater, he looks incredibly normal.

Will admires the play of muscles in his back, just visible through the thin fabric, and the flex of his forearms, glistening from the soapy water. But he doesn't allow himself to be distracted for long, no matter how watching him brings to mind his dream with a pleasant stirring in Will's groin.

Maybe he doesn't want Hannibal dead, but that doesn't mean he's just ready to *forgive* him, especially while Hannibal maintains his innocence. For months he took knowing advantage of Will's illness to drive Will to the brink, unknown and unseen. It seems only fair to return the favour now.

Everything Hannibal does is purposeful. His home is meticulously kept, everything precisely in place. Hannibal is the sort who would notice the shifting of a vase a few inches to the right, a book out of order on the shelf. It was clear finding his pantry in such a state last night had an impact on him.

That's only the beginning.

There's music playing over the house's sound system. His knowledge of classical music is limited to what Hannibal has exposed him to, but this sounds familiar. Perhaps something he played over dinner before. The cd player is in the living room, and Will and flips through the discs.

It's mostly recordings of operas and collections of famous composers, but there is a surprising amount of jazz, and a sprinkling classic and modern rock, r&b, and pop. The man is an endless source of surprise.

The empty disc case is for Debussy. Will waits until a lull between songs and quickly switches it out for the first disc of Verdi's Otello. He replaces the Debussy in its proper place on the shelf. As the strains of the first song begins to play, the running water from the kitchen stops, and the clatter of dishes falls silent.

After a moment, Hannibal enters the room, head cocked to the side. His eyes fall closed just as they had the night before and his nostrils flare as he smells deeply. His brows draw together, lips pursing slightly in thought, expression pained. Will can't even fully process what it is he sees there, but he likes being the cause of it.

Going the cd player, he comes within a few scant inches of where Will stands, and Will is greatly tempted to reach out and touch. He clenches his hands in the fabric of the chair to stop himself. Hannibal takes the Debussy from it's place, opens the case, and brushes his fingers over the disc. It's still warm from being in the player, of course. He inhales again before replacing the cd, and turns on his heel, a complete 360 of the room, face carefully blank.

Will's stomach drops somewhere around his toes, that delightfully sick feeling of reaching the top of the roller coaster, right before the descent. He holds his breath, aroused and terrified.

Then Hannibal finally leaves and heads back into the kitchen, and Will continues his search. He peruses the bookshelves; more leisure reading than his shelves at the office. Volumes of poetry and classic literature, mostly in French. Will's eyes light on a familiar title from sophomore year French class that feels particularly appropriate given their current situation. He takes it with him when he goes.

Will moves through the house, fingers trailing over the furniture, the fresh flowers in the hall and the foyer. He plucks a lily from one, letting the pollen dust over the banister on his way upstairs. He drops it in the empty, decorative vase on the wall mounted shelf at the top of the stairs.

Hannibal's bedroom is eerily similar to how it appeared in his dream. Warm woods and cool, soothing blues, and a strange mixture of modern and classic elements that somehow come

together. Will could see Hannibal moving through this space just like in his mind, everything more about the aesthetics than the functions.

The book goes on the nightstand, after he flips it open to the right page. He sifts through Hannibal's drawers, rearranges a few things absentmindedly. Runs his hands over every suit jacket in the closet, fucks around with his toiletries because he's not above a little pettiness. It's the very least he can do. He squeezes the perfectly rolled up toothpaste tube from the middle, puts the toilet seat up.

Back in the bedroom, Will lays himself out on the velvety blanket that covers the bed--it's clear that Hannibal is smelling him, and that's causing him no small measure of discomfort. Will's going to give him a noseful. He cradles Hannibal's pillows to his chest, rubs his legs against the sheets. Let him fucking *wallow* in it.

After sleeping in his cell for the past fifteen days, lumpy cot, scratchy sheets, and the overpowering stench of bleach, Hannibal's thousand thread count satin sheets feel like fucking heaven on his bare skin. It's tempting to linger, but he's already stayed longer than he should without knowing Hannibal's routine. He could come to bed at any moment, and Will fully intends to give as good as he got. That requires subtlety, not Hannibal coming in to find a human shaped lump in his bed.

As he's rolling out of bed, the mirror over the fireplace catches his eye. It's currently angled to reflect the bench at the foot of the bed, but Will has an inkling of an idea that's confirmed when he opens the draw of the nightstand and finds a remote control.

In his mind he can hear Hannibal's voice as clearly as if he were speaking the words just now, telling Will to allow the mirrors in his mind to reflect the best of himself. He plays with the buttons on the controller until the mirror is tilted almost as high as it goes. Then he remakes the bed and takes the controller with him on the way out of the room. He tucks it away behind the decorative embellishments at the top of a curio cabinet, hidden from sight.

Downstairs Hannibal is finished with his dishes and has once again retired to his study. He hasn't changed the music, and sits in a seat before the fireplace, wine glass in hand. Will joins him, taking a seat in the chair opposite. The leather squeaks in protest, but Hannibal either doesn't notice, or doesn't care. His lips move along silently with the tenor, and as the music reaches a crescendo, his eyes fall closed.

It should feel like triumph, knowing how deep Hannibal's remorse runs, especially in the face of his continued betrayal every time he shows up at the hospital, lying right to Will's face. But there's no satisfaction at all.

They sit there for a time, listening together, and if Will closes his eyes as well, it feels companionable. This could be any evening after dinner, sharing a nightcap before Will drives home. Only for all his faults and betrayals, Hannibal's presence was always a balm to Will before, easing the overwhelming sense of isolation.

This loneliness, occupying the same space as Hannibal, only unseen and unheard, is almost unbearable. On his way out, he takes the bottle of wine he shop-lifted from its hiding spot

and places it conspicuously front and centre on Hannibal's wine rack. Same vintage and varietal as the one he brought Hannibal what seems like a lifetime ago.

Will leaves, mind buzzing blankly the entire drive back. He has trouble falling asleep, cold even after he's dressed and huddled under his blanket.

*

Hannibal has never been one to discount any possibility, no matter how outlandish. When, for the second time in as many days, he catches Will's scent drifting through his home, he has to consider the possibility that he is losing his mind.

Though an unlikely proposition, growing up he heard the stories of the previous Count Lecters, of inherited madness. Of course, nothing like that had been recorded in the past few generations, and he's reached midlife without any symptoms. Besides, Hannibal has always felt he was at least equal parts circumstance and personal choice, not one to be reduced to neurochemistry.

On his bedside, The Count of Monte Cristo lies open to the passage between the Abbé Faria and Dantès, one line highlighted by the placement of the ribbon bookmark: *Je vous ai infiltré dans le cœur un sentiment qui n'y était point: la vengeance.*

These are things he cannot simply dismiss as forgetfulness. The world and its occupants being as unpredictable as they are, Hannibal has always been able to rely on his own senses with an unflappable surety. It is unsettling, to say the least, standing in his study with the unmistakable sensation of being watched. All the indications that there is another presence in the room with him--that either his sight has failed him, or all his other senses combined.

Trying to sleep on his sheets is torturous--more than just the familiar sweat and earth, smoke and river water, it's Will's arousal, sharp on the back of his tongue. This is a smell he is not as familiar with, but altogether undeniably Will. His mouth waters and his body responds in kind, as he breathes deep of the scent.

When he gives up trying to sleep, he strips the bed down and replaces the sheets. Once the old have been bundled into the hamper, the smell fades. Curious, it would indicate an actual physical presence of the scent, than an imagined one, but how? Short of Will himself coming here and rolling around on his sheets?

Hannibal finds himself smiling at the image his mind conjures, innocuously amusing, as he tucks himself back in bed. It is then that his eye catches on the reflection of the mirror. His own eyes stare back at him suspicious and impenetrable. Blindly, a single furrow creasing between his brows, he reaches for the remote control in the bedside drawer. After a moment, he turns to look in aid of the search, but to no avail. It simply isn't there.

The hallucinations, if they can be termed as such, have thus far been isolated incidences, confined to his home. Will's scent like a ghost down his halls and on his sheets, the music changing abruptly. But then there are the other, external factors. Things not where he left them, the warm cd, the flowers, the arrangement of the mirror.

It could be a tumor, he supposes. With no other symptoms of delirium or psychosis, it's the only remaining option that makes any sense. That would be a fitting punishment, and yet, it is not quite right.

Sleep is a long time in coming. That is particularly troubling, after decades of conditioning allowing him to compartmentalise and fall asleep quickly and easily, regardless of circumstance. More than anything else, it is what leads him to call an old colleague in the morning.

Certainly Doctor Sutcliffe would have been more convenient, all things considered, than driving all the way to Philadelphia for a battery of tests. He returns in the afternoon, however, with the reassurance that there is no sign of anything amiss on the MRI or cat scan or in the bloodwork.

That means little in the face of what he finds in the office. He is meticulous with his records. It is unthinkable that he would have left at the end of the day without putting them in their proper place. The notes in question, spread over his desk haphazardly, are those on Will Graham. Potentially damning notes, at that.

More and more this reads like some elaborate prank orchestrated to make him question his sanity, and were it not for Will's incarceration, he would have no doubt in his mind who was responsible. But if not Will, then who?

The most likely culprit is Beverly Katz, but if she were working at Will's behest, why leave these notes here? Why would she have not taken them as evidence, along with the contents of his refrigerator? That alone would have been enough to damn him, and with that sort of evidence, Jack would already be knocking down his door.

But this is all relatively harmless, almost juvenile, really. Petty, pointed jabs designed to make him feel regret over his actions--particularly in regards to Will. It seems unlikely that Ms Katz would indulge in such behaviour.

When he arrives home, he goes about his nightly routine. Laying out the ingredients for the meal he's planned, and selecting wine to accompany it. He pauses at the sight of the bottle of Propriétés Vernon--the wine Will brought him, one of the many pieces he used to frame Will for his own crimes. It's a Bordeaux, the same vintage even, and Hannibal is absolutely certain he didn't purchase it himself.

A faintly amused chuckle passes his lips, and Hannibal takes the bottle from the rack. It will pair nicely with the roasted, herb-encrusted lamb chops he's making. He cuts away the foil and uncorks it, letting it breathe, as he goes to start dinner.

*

In the morning, there is another bottle, whole and uncorked, in the empty space left behind.

He installs cameras at the entrances to both his home and office, and waits.

Chapter End Notes

CoMC translation: "I have insinuated a feeling into your heart that was not previously there: the desire for revenge."

Sorry for the wait--been away from the internet, and thanks for your patience and comments <3

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It becomes a habit, Will sneaking out each evening to visit Hannibal's home, treading behind him silently as Hannibal moves about his evening routine. What could quickly grow boring, this silent observation of the mundane, Will finds fascinating.

Hannibal is just a man. Despite his extracurricular activities, there is nothing supernatural about him at all. Between the murders, the over-the-top displays, clothed in the garments of normalcy, Hannibal is unavoidably human. He brings in the mail and pays his bills, clears the ice and snow from the front walk, dusts and sweeps and mops the house. Of course he wouldn't have a housekeeper who might stumble upon something they shouldn't see, but the mundanity of everyday life is incongruous with the image Will has formed of the Ripper.

And of course, he takes no small measure of amusement from following along in his wake. Misplacing the gas bill or replacing all of Hannibal's fancy coffee beans with store brand from Safeway. He only regrets not being able to see the expression on Hannibal's face at the first sip.

Will helps himself to the leftovers of Hannibal's dinners, just as grandiose and skilfully prepared when cooking for himself as for a group. It's especially welcome after the slop that Chilton considers good, only meeting the most basic nutritional standards.

Right up to the point where he bites down on the meat, Will isn't sure he'll be able to eat it. He waits for his conscious to kick in, to remind himself just what he's about to put in his body. But the flavour breaks on his tongue, and the meat is tender, moist, melt-in-your mouth good. His eyes flutter shut and he moans around the mouthful.

After the freedom of his evenings, it would stand to reason that he should be better able to handle the limitations of his cell, but Will feels them more keenly than ever before. He spends the mornings pacing, making vague plans of what to do next, how best to escalate things with Hannibal.

Today, as if he's been conjured into being by Will's thoughts, in the early afternoon Hannibal comes to visit.

Will hears the sound of expensive Italian leather and steady footsteps, unaccompanied by the click of the cane, and knows without looking who it is that approaches his cell. He wonders if Chilton got wind of the situation with Beverly afterall, if that's why he's not being allowed to see Hannibal in the visiting room.

Or maybe it's a power play. A message for Hannibal, from Chilton. That he is here as a guest, and nothing more. He won't be granted the courtesy of a private room to conduct a therapy session, as he is no longer Will's therapist.

Will's lips curl in a smile at the idea that anything Chilton could do would be little more than a fleeting nuisance to Hannibal. A fly buzzing around the head of a mighty beast. Hannibal catches sight of the expression and his own freezes, somewhere between polite concern and something far more cuttingly insightful, then goes carefully blank.

"Will," he greets, a dip of his head.

"Doctor Lecter," Will returns, drawing the last syllable out. He leans back against the wall, arms crossed over his chest. It is clear from the start that Hannibal is left wrong-footed by this reception. Whatever he was expecting to see, this is not it. "I'm surprised Chilton let you in."

The gears in Hannibal's head change direction. "I did have to insist, I'm afraid."

"Are you alright, Doctor?" Will asks. He takes delight in Hannibal's consternation, grin coming easily. "You look as though you've seen a ghost."

Hannibal tilts his head to the side, eyes narrowed ever so slightly. He draws a breath. "Were you lying to me, Will? When you asked for my help?"

Will spares him the faintest hint of a smile, teasing and insouciant. "Why would I lie to you about that, Hannibal?"

The use of his first name seems to put Hannibal off-guard. He pauses, lips parted, before closing them and gathering himself. Granted, it all happens in the span of half of a second, but Will drinks in every detail. "You'll forgive me if it has been difficult to keep up with, as of late. One moment you're accusing me of murder and promising me a reckoning, the next saying I'm the only one you can trust..."

"I wasn't in my right mind then," Will says, leaning close to the bars.

Hannibal's eyes are sharp as a hawk's. "Which time?" he asks. Will just grins and sucks his teeth in response.

"Is that the only reason you came to visit? To apprehend the truth of my statement?"

"No." Hannibal's voice is soft, his lashes a dark fan against his cheekbones when he closes his eyes a beat longer than a blink. "Though I admit, it has weighed heavy on my mind, knowing that your esteem of me has been impacted in this way."

"Ah," Will says. His hands drop from around the bars and he takes a step back. "And you came for peace of mind."

"If it is peace of mind I seek," Hannibal said, "It is not for myself, but for you, in this place."

"Oh, don't worry about me," Will tells him. He's all one sharp, brittle edge, ready to shatter at the wrong word. Hannibal must read some inkling of it in him. "I've got *Chilton* to fumble blindly along towards diagnosis, like a freshman for a bra strap."

Hannibal's brows raise in surprise, whether at the information or the way Will presented it, it's difficult to say. Will inches closer, forehead pressed to the bars, and Hannibal mirrors him, moving in. No one calls out for him to step back--maybe Chilton's too distracted listening in.

"He gave me something--a hypnotic. Midazolam, maybe, or temazepam," Will whispers.

"Hypnotics that alter perception and render you easily suggestible," Hannibal finishes the thought for him.

Will struggles to keep the pointed bitterness from his voice when he speaks. "I remembered strobing lights in your office. *You* putting a needle in my arm. *You* injecting me."

It's truly fascinating, how perfectly Hannibal performs the role, how seamless his mask. All honest, conciliatory worry for Will and his plight. "What was happening while you were experiencing this memory?"

Will nods, anticipating that line of reasoning. "Chilton was doing the same--putting the needle in my arm, injecting me, telling me what I remembered. It was remarkably vivid, like a real memory."

Hannibal's lips thin grimly. "A memory of injection while being injected. I've treated patients whose situations were not dissimilar to yours. People who discover that some part of their memory, as they know it, is based on a falsehood."

"But why," Will hisses, and his fervance is not feigned. He clings to the bars, their metallic scent filling his nose. "Why would he *do that* to me?"

They've been walking a fine line here, both dabbling in double speak, and now Hannibal has fallen in his trap. He either gives a truthful answer, speaking for himself, or he continues to frame it in terms of what Chilton has done, and risk Will shutting down altogether.

"Any psychiatrist worth his salt would only engage in such therapy in order to help you," Hannibal says.

"Help me?" Will echoes and snorts in disbelief. He pins Hannibal in place with his eyes. Their hands brush on the bars, and were it not for that obstruction, their foreheads would touch.

"To better understand yourself," Hannibal explains, voice low and thrilling, almost hypnotic itself. His gaze bearing into Will's, willing him to accept this as truth. "To help you come to terms with things you'd rather keep buried, to your own detriment."

"Huh." Will steps away abruptly, straightening, voice rising out of the whisper-pitch. "You'd think it would be kind of pointless to walk back from that, after, then, wouldn't you?"

Hannibal straightens too, adjusting his coat so it drapes over his joined hands. His posture is one of appraisal. "I suppose it would be," he says, at length.

Will exhales in satisfaction. “Honesty, like friendship, is a two way street, wouldn’t you say?” When Hannibal gives his single nod of assent, Will’s pleasure expands, warm in his chest. “Then tell me, Hannibal, have you missed me?”

Hannibal opens his mouth to respond, but Will isn’t going to let him off that easily. He surges forward again, fingers tight on the bars of his cell, speaking only for Hannibal now. “Does my absence haunt you?”

Chilton can turn up his mics all he wants, he’s not going to hear this, barely more than a breath. If it weren’t for the way Hannibal’s eyes widen, just that slightest little bit, Will would think he’d missed it, too. It might giving away more than Will wants, but it’s entirely worth it, for the look on Hannibal’s face.

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Hannibal’s acknowledgement of his sins, however opaquely veiled, opens the door for reconciliation, but there are bridges still to be crossed before Will can simply forgive and forget. A debt to be repaid, in a manner of speaking.

It’s not very difficult to catch Brown’s eye, considering that he’s always watching Will. After Hannibal leaves, Brown comes strolling down the hall, whistling jauntily, carrying Will’s lunch tray. He makes a big show of following the rules when others are around, but when Will comes closer to the bars rather than putting his hands against the wall like he’s supposed to, Brown doesn’t reprimand him. He just stands there, frozen, watching Will steadily from under his lashes.

Will reaches out to take the tray, one finger drawing over Brown’s index finger, down to the curve into his thumb, gaze never wavering. Brown’s head cants to the side, bird-like, and his eyes change. They straighten and step closer at the same time, standing as near to one another as he and Hannibal had been, earlier.

“Is there something I can do for you, Mister Graham?” Brown looks keen for the order, practically vibrating with suppressed energy.

“I swear the walls have ears in this place.” Will cast his gaze towards the ceiling. “If there were anything I wanted, it would be a way to convey my thanks to the person responsible for taking care of the bailiff and the judge in my trial.” He rolls his eyes back around to catch Brown’s pointedly.

“Persons,” Brown says, equally pointed.

Ah. Yes. Will had guessed as much. The judge definitely spoke of Hannibal’s handiwork, blind justice and all that pretentious nonsense. It wasn’t that Brown lacked artistry, but he wasn’t particularly imaginative. Will was curious what his design would be, when Brown wasn’t merely echoing the murders Will had been framed for.

“I’m curious as to why they were helping me.”

“You ever see the way small birds will mob a hawk on a wire?” Brown asks, with an odd immediacy. Will nods ponderously. “You remind me of a hawk, Mister Graham. I’d guess whoever it was that helped you was, too.”

Will quirks a brow. “Hawks are solitary.”

Brown shrugs, already straightening out of his slouch and drawing back. “That’s their weakness. Enough of those little birds get together and they chase hawks away. Imagine if the hawks started working together. In any case, I’ll see what I can do for you.”

“There’s something else,” Will says, reaching past the bars but not quite touching, as Brown turns to leave.

Brown nods at his lunch tray. “I’ll be back for that in an hour. And any other trash you need taken out.”

Will lets his smile widen, slow and sinister, and Brown returns it with one of his own. He’s whistling again, on his way down the hall, incongruently cheerful for this place, but Will finds he doesn’t mind it.

The food barely deserves the designation, but he chokes it down, regardless. Something about using this ability makes him famished and exhausted down to his bones. He can’t risk becoming weak from hunger just now.

Precisely an hour later, Brown makes the rounds again, dragging his trolley along. Dragging his night stick along Gideon’s bars when he doesn’t immediately get up to deliver his tray back. And then strolling up to Will’s cell with a teasing smirk toying around his lips. He angles his body just right to shield them from the cameras. “You wanted to speak more freely?”

Will raises both brows in questioning. “I figured Chilton had this entire place wired.”

“Who do you think hooked it up?” Brown asks, tonguing the inside of his lip, teeth on display. It’s a heady mix of smugness, lust, and murderous intent that radiates from him. Will takes advantage of that, giving him a simpering smile.

“In that case, I do have a favour to ask of you.”

“Just say the words.”

Will leans closer and Brown responds in kind, turning his head so Will can whisper in his ear, “Kill Hannibal Lecter. Tonight.”

When Brown draws back, his smirk has transformed into a full-blown grin. With a subtle nod, and a murmured, “Anything for a friend,” he rolls the trolley away.

There’s groaning of springs and shifting of fabric from next door, then Gideon leaning against his own bars. “Awful lot of whispering over there today, Mister Graham,” Gideon remarks in that lascivious drawl of his. “Awful lot of secrets you’re bandying about.”

Will ignores him and turns back to his cot for a nap. Brown is on second shift right now, which means he gets off at ten. That leaves Will plenty of time after lights out to sneak out, break into his car, and be waiting when he goes after Hannibal.

If Hannibal is up to Will's challenge, if he can handle Brown as Will handled Budge, as Will is almost certain he can, that's one more step towards standing on even ground. But it's different, Hannibal sending Will after Budge armed and alert to the potential danger of the situation. No, Will has to level the playing field tonight, in the spirit of fairness.

And he'd be lying if he said that he didn't want to watch this go down. He knows what Hannibal is capable of now. The Copycat Killer and The Chesapeake Ripper have committed their crimes over and over again in Will's mind, all horrible, graceful brutality. Now he wants to see it for himself, firsthand.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the long wait. I truly intended to update sooner, but life conspired against me. Don't worry, there's plenty more to come, and after Big Bang is passed (the fic for that is taking most of my time), I'll be posting more frequently to this one!

Chapter 5

Hannibal runs his keycard through the lock on door, waiting for the light the click over from red to green. The inside of the club is silent, still, and dark. There are lifeguards during the busy hours of the early morning through mid-afternoon, but this late at night it is understood that one swims at one's own risk.

Occasionally there are others, but by and large Hannibal has the pool to himself after eleven on weeknights. Tonight there are a couple of people towelling off in the locker room, chatting about grabbing a beer once they leave, nodding to Hannibal companionably.

Another man enters as Hannibal is storing his things in his locker, but the pool is empty when Hannibal passes through on his way to the gymnasium. After he's finished his dynamic stretches and warm-up and returns to change into his swimsuit, all the of the men are gone including, curiously, the man who'd entered after him.

Hannibal is distracted from any further thoughts of the man when he catches a faint whiff of Will's scent. It's overwhelmed by the burning sting of chlorine in his nostrils, the cleaning chemicals and air fresheners used in the locker room, the stench of sweat and bodily waste. But Will is there nonetheless, rising enticingly above.

His conversation with Will this morning posed more questions than it answered, and his mind has lingered there all day, in the dark, musty corners of the hospital, as if he were locked away alongside Will. Even now, going through the the exercises he normally performs with a clear mind, he can think of little else.

Will has extended a hand in apparent reconciliation, but his terms are quite clear. He wants Hannibal's honesty. Anything less, and he'll cut Hannibal off altogether--for good this time. It is a dangerous line to walk, when he is yet uncertain of Will's end game. Is he prepared to embrace the truths Hannibal has exposed to him, or is this just an attempt to lure him into complacency while he works to entrap him?

That's the excuse he gives himself for imagining Will's scent, at least until he opens his locker. He freezes, on alert, at the sight of a folded slip of paper with a tranquiliser dart resting on top. A quick scan of the room confirms he is alone. There is no sound but the steady drip of a leaky shower head and the hum of the heating system.

Hannibal picks up the dart, examining the syringe, but there's no way of telling the contents in this setting. Regardless, the dosage is quite high--likely whoever has prepared it is more concerned with rendering their target unconscious as quickly as possible, and less concerned with any lasting negative effects of the drug.

Setting it aside, he unfolds the note. The hand is Will's familiar cursive, scrawled across the paper. *Enjoy your gift*.

When Hannibal closes his eyes and draws upon his memory, he can see the face of the man who'd entered the locker room behind him--catalogued absently, but unstudied. Now, beneath

the brim of his ballcap, Hannibal recalls the familiar features of the orderly from the hospital. Brown, he believes. His interest in Will had been impossible to miss.

Had Will asked Brown to deliver this message for him? And to what end? Hannibal taps the note thoughtfully against his lips, breathing in Will's scent. Powerful, and immediate, and Hannibal can almost imagine that the paper still holds the warmth of Will's hand. No other scent is present, on the note or the dart. Either Brown handled them with gloved hands, or…

Hannibal has toyed with the possibility that Will has found a way free of his cage. With Brown assisting him, Will could avoid notice, moving about in the night and safely back in his cell by morning. His motivation for doing so remains murky, as does the nature of the gift to which Will refers. There is an unavoidable threat to the thing.

He could leave now; it would be the safest way to proceed. He cannot say whether this note is a warning or a trap, but he is intrigued, as Will would know he would be. He refolds the paper and places it back inside the locker, which he closes and locks.

At any rate, it would be rude to refuse a gift.

*

Will finds a place to observe, climbing to the top of the lifeguard tower. Hannibal emerges first from the locker rooms. Strange, almost unnerving to see him out of his perfectly tailored suits. Will's gut lurches pleasantly at the sight of him, body strong but starting to soften with age. It is simultaneously apparent he is a man who enjoys his food and who takes good care of himself, and Will finds he appreciates the combination.

Hannibal surveys the room, eyes lingering in the shadowy corners of the open, every possible place someone could hide. They ghost right past Will's perch, and the sensation in Will's stomach tightens. Even aware of a threat, Will easily escaped his notice. Perhaps at some point in the future Will will have to level that playing field, as well.

With fluid grace, Hannibal dives, breaking the sheet glass surface of the pool with barely a splash. He cuts through the water with powerful strokes, the muscles of his back and shoulders rippling. Light sends flickering reflections over the tiled walls and glistens on Hannibal's skin in a way that calls to mind waking from vivid dreams, slick with sweat and the memory of rolling together naked, pressed skin to skin.

There's almost a musicality to it, the way Hannibal's body moves under the surface, the smooth, almost off-handed way he lifts his head above the water every few strokes to inhale before ducking under again, how his body curls tight into a ball at the turn and kicks off the wall. Will can bob his head along in time to the rhythm.

Brown waits long enough that Will has almost forgotten his presence, lulled into a sort of peaceful daze just watching. Unlike Hannibal, Brown looks like a young man in the prime of physicality, the sharp definition of his muscles. He has a swimmer's body--tall, long-limbed, and hairless, with broad shoulders and tapered hips.

He lingers, just watching, as Hannibal swims up and down the length of the pool twice. Then, when Hannibal makes the turn and heads back towards Will's position, Brown dives into the pool in the next lane. He swims quickly, catching up with Hannibal in a handful of strokes, and Hannibal must be aware of it, feeling crowded. He puts on an impressive burst of speed and pulls away.

Will jumps down from the tower with a smacking sound on the tiles that neither of the others hears, and hurries across the slippery tiles to Matthew's towel. Hidden in the folds is the tranquiliser gun. With one eye on the water, Will removes the dart. There's only so much he can do, beyond leaving one of the darts for Hannibal as warning. He has nothing with which to replace the liquid.

They've made the turn and are coming back this way, and Will has no idea how long Brown plans on playing this game. He keeps low to the ground, holding the dart low behind the bulk of the towel so it won't be noticed, and depresses the plunger on the syringe, until there's only two milliliters left. He manages to shove the dart back into place just as they reach the near end of the lanes, and drops the towel back over the gun.

Together, they make another lap, Brown trailing just behind. This time, he hauls himself out when Hannibal makes the turn, tugs off his goggles. He pulls the tranquiliser gun out, holding it casually at his side. He's comfortable with it--this clearly isn't the first time he's done this.

Will can't look away, but Brown is patient. He doesn't make a move until Hannibal pulls himself up against the side of the pool, glancing behind himself as if to size up his fellow swimmer. Then Brown steps closer, blocking out the light, and Hannibal glances up at him.

He must know, even before Brown raises the gun, but Hannibal makes no attempt to dodge. The dart catches him in the shoulder and he grabs for it, pulls it from the muscle and it drops from nerveless fingers. Will watches, oddly breathless, when Hannibal reaches again for the side of the pool, but he doesn't quite make it, body going limp and heavy. He has to clutch the side of the tower to keep from throwing himself in the pool as Hannibal begins to sink to the bottom.

And isn't this fucking enlightening? The sudden and absolute knowledge that he's going to step in here, if he has to. That no matter what he's told himself or the implications he's made towards Hannibal, Will doesn't want him dead--especially not at someone else's hands. That honour should be his, if nothing else.

That's what he tells himself, anyway, swallowing the unexpected tide of panic that rises in his chest and chokes him until Brown has dragged Hannibal from the pool and Will can see the slow, uneven rise of Hannibal's chest.

Brown moves Hannibal to the steam room, Will following at a safe distance. Even with his considerable strength, Hannibal's dead weight puts an obvious strain on Brown. He struggles with Hannibal up a short row of stairs, steam wreathing them. A mop and bucket have been set aside and a noose is hung suspended from the ceiling.

Will sees Brown's design beginning to take shape. Hannibal perched precariously on the bucket, slick with perspiration in the humidity of the room. Arms bound to the mop stick,

spread out and on display. Brown bends to lay Hannibal on the floor and in his back pocket is the outline of a box cutter. With a flash of revelation, Will sees the rivulets of blood from Hannibal's wrists, trailing across the dark marble in bold crimson ribbons

From a purely aesthetic perspective, Will supposes Hannibal would approve. But for all its artfulness, it lacks the intimacy that Will would prefer. No, if he were to kill Hannibal, he would use his hands. Skin on skin, and the pounding pulse of blood just beneath, the solid press of body against body and bones crushing from the force of his blows. Sinking his teeth into vulnerable flesh and tearing. Hot blood spilling over his mouth and down his chin.

The thought alone leaves Will breathless and wanting, blood rushing south. Somewhere along the way, it becomes something else, and Will can no longer feign surprise of dismay when his thoughts morph from violence to lust seamlessly.

It's only made worse when Brown rises and turns away, and Hannibal's eyes slit open. Then Will understands he was only pretending the whole while, allowing Brown to fatigue himself by hauling Hannibal from the pool and halfway across the building. Now, with Brown's back turned, Hannibal rolls onto his side and to his feet in delicate, lithesome movement, rising silent.

The hallucinations from the encephalitis are gone, but Will still imagines he can see the shadows gathering around him, sinister and exquisite. Antlers sprouting from his head and slick, oily black rolling over his skin. He lunges for Brown, and the man is caught entirely unaware when Hannibal hooks an arm around his neck.

Almost immediately, it becomes clear that Brown has the upper hand physically. Hannibal's pupils are blown dark from the drug and he's unsteady on his feet when Brown begins to struggle against his hold. Brown plants his feet and tries to throw Hannibal over his shoulder, but Hannibal turns with the motion, loosening his hold and sliding around until they're face to face, using Brown's moment of surprise and disrupted balance to jerk his head downward as Hannibal brings his knee up, catching him square in the nose.

"I wanted you to hang for your betrayal," Brown says, staggering back. He touches a hand to nose and grins, teeth blood-stained. "But if you insist on a more violent end, who am I to deny you?"

"You're not here for yourself," Hannibal says. His voice is slurred from the drug. "Did Will Graham send you after me?"

Brown lunges and when Hannibal skitters away, falls back himself, laughing outright. "He and I have a mutual respect."

There's humour in Hannibal's eyes, too, so faint that no one else might recognise it, but Will feels it as clearly and warmly as a caress. "Will is not who you think he is. He is no murderer."

Brown shrugs. "Maybe not yet, but soon. At least by proxy."

“He asked you to do this?” Hannibal, Will knows, is not surprised by this information. It joins with an image he’s forming in his mind, put together with the message Will left for him in his locker and the conversation they had this morning.

“What are friends for?” Brown asks, hands spread wide in magnanimity.

“Indeed,” Hannibal agrees, baring his teeth in an approximation of a grin, but fiercer and less restrained, his mask fraying at the edges. “What an incredible gift, friendship.” Will’s heart lurches at the understanding and acceptance of his gift, and the inhuman gleam in Hannibal’s eyes.

Brown too is caught off-guard by it. He rushes at Hannibal again, a little hastily, catching him around the middle and sending them both sprawling to the slick floor. They wrestle, both drawing blood with fist and Hannibal with teeth. But when Hannibal gains the upper hand, rolling Brown beneath him, in the position to deal the killing blow, he instead staggers to his feet and away.

Hannibal’s gaze is assessing and wary. He’s dropped low into a fighter’s stance, keeping a safe distance between himself and Brown’s long reach, but he’s leaning to the side, as if a strong shove will send him toppling over. He staggers and catches himself, but too late to cover for it.

Will’s mind races with Hannibal’s thoughts--the ways he could use his environment to his advantage, a catalogue of weapons and deaths for Brown. The fierce desire to hang him up with the noose and give him the death he intended to give Hannibal along with the understanding that the risks are far too great.

Cameras would have spotted them both entering, so there would be no hiding the fact that Hannibal was the last to see Brown alive, and no matter how fastidious Hannibal was with his crime scenes, this wasn’t one he’d planned ahead of time. There would be evidence left behind. That option robbed of him, Hannibal would consider how best to frame this as another case of self-defense, but even that would draw unwanted attention, and time is running out before he succumbs to the tranquiliser.

Jack already has his questions over Budge’s death and with Will’s insistence that Hannibal is the Copycat, another death might be the tipping point. Will can’t risk that, anymore than he can allow Brown to kill Hannibal. This game doesn’t end with either of them in a cell any longer.

A decision has been made in Hannibal’s mind, and what is both unsettling and thrilling is that Will doesn’t know, precisely, what that is. Hannibal moves like a dancer, swift and light on his feet, feinting right and darting left, coming in close with a left hook. He ducks under Brown’s punch and drives his fist beneath Brown’s ribs on the right side with shattering force to his liver.

It costs them both--Hannibal’s strength lagging, Brown staggering, almost going down on his knees. Another man, any less fit, likely would have been felled by it. Brown fumbles for the blade, flicking it open between then, and the change in Hannibal’s eyes is minute, but clear. He’s going to kill Brown, and Will moves fast.

The dart gun lies on the floor, knocked there in their wrestling. Will kneels to pick it up and pries free the remaining dart. He has to dodge backwards as they come close, rolling to the side, and he jams the dart in Brown's leg as he does and drops the gun just behind him.

They both freeze at that--Brown when he realises what's happened; Hannibal when Brown sways unsteadily. Brown falls to his knees and they both look to the gun. It's close enough one of them could have knocked into it, but it wouldn't have fired like that, and the angle is all wrong. Brown slashes towards Hannibal with the blade, but it's easily avoided, Hannibal stepping back as Brown finally collapses the rest of the way to the ground.

Hannibal's eyes narrow, and already he's switching gear. Will waits, ready to intervene, to reveal himself, if he must, to stop Hannibal from killing Brown, but it proves unnecessary. He kicks the blade away, picks up the gun and tucks it in his waistband, crouches to feel for Brown's pulse. Satisfied with what he finds, he fishes through Brown's pockets and produces a cellphone. He catches himself mid-fall with a hand to the wall and lowers himself carefully to sit on the topmost step where he can keep his eye on Brown.

After he enters the number from memory, there's a brief silence, and then Jack's familiar voice on the other end of the line. Hannibal explains the attack, but leaves out the part about the note of warning. Will's breath leaves him in one long exhale when Hannibal says that Brown is alive, but unconscious. It catches Hannibal's notice. He glances in Will's direction, gaze flicking up and down through the empty space suspiciously.

Will waits until Jack is speaking again, calling Hannibal's attention back to him, before he makes his exit, all too aware of the footprints he leaves on the floor. They melt away slowly in the steam, lingering long after Will has slipped from the room.

*

Jack insists that Hannibal ride to the hospital for monitoring until the drug has been identified. If he were not already feeling the drag of the tranquiliser, perhaps Hannibal would put up greater resistance. The dosage was much lower for himself than for Brown for reasons Jack can't explain, though Hannibal has his suspicions. All the same, it's best to play the role of the helpless victim, lucky to have escaped with his life yet again.

While he awaited their arrival, Hannibal removed the note and dart to another locker, to retrieve later. He tries to puzzle it out, but his thoughts are far too scattered, drifting ephemeral through his mind as he slips in and out of consciousness. At times he wakes in the ambulance on the ride to the hospital, and later in a triage room, awaiting the results of a battery of tests.

"Etorphine hydrochloride." Hannibal blinks his eyes open to see Jack at his bedside.

"I'm assuming the diperenorphine has already been administered?" It would explain Hannibal's sudden clear-headedness. His mind is already racing, revisiting the events of the evening with renewed focus.

Jack nods. "Brown's pretty tight-lipped, I'll hand it to him. Turns out he learned to imitate orderlies from his time as an inmate in a mental institution himself. Won't say a word about

why he came after you, though."

Hannibal is careful with his words. "It is difficult to say without knowing the nature and extent of his psychoses."

"That may be," Jack allows. Hannibal is aware of scrutiny, as though he knows precisely who Hannibal is covering for, and why. "We can't say for certain if he never speaks, but I've got a pretty good idea. I've got men at his place--there's enough to get him on the bailiff's murder, at least. That's one murder he committed for the benefit of Will Graham."

Hannibal stares back at him, face arranged in mute surprise. "You can't honestly think Will orchestrated this."

Jack is the very picture of defeated weariness. "I know you're trying to help him, Doctor, but it may just be that he's beyond help."

"I remain unconvinced of Will's guilt in the first place," Hannibal tells him mildly. "That Matthew Brown would commit these crimes on his behalf speaks no more to Will's guilt than Will's insistence of my being the Copycat speaks to mine."

"Well whatever his reasoning, this isn't going to help Will's case."

Jack is called away and Hannibal is released shortly after. A polite young agent drives him home, and Hannibal can't help but think of Will doing the same, in the aftermath of Budge's attack. This ride lacks that warmth of camaraderie, Will's fledgling concern covering Hannibal like a trauma blanket.

At home, Hannibal goes to his study and opens his laptop. For each day there are five videos, one for each entrance to his home and office. Hannibal has taken a cursory look at them--there is far too much footage to easily watch them in their entirety, especially with his increased frequency of his work with the FBI on top of his regular activity.

Now, with the new information that it is indeed Will making these changes in his home, Hannibal makes the time. It stands to reason he would only have the opportunity in the late hours of evening and early morning when he won't be missed from his cell. The supposition allows Hannibal to at least narrow down the search window. He starts by bringing up the video of the French doors in his kitchen.

The work is tedious. The first hour he sees nothing out of the ordinary, as he views each of the videos from the first night after he installed them. There is no one moving through his home but Hannibal himself. He's about to move on to the next evening when he sees a blur of movement in the corner of the screen.

Hannibal rewinds the video--the view of the back door to his office--and slows it down to regular speed for a better look. Neither of the doors to the office move, but in the utter stillness of an empty room in the middle of the night, even the slightest movement is arresting.

There, where the frame catches the edge of his desk, a shadow shifts. Not a human shadow, Hannibal realises, but that of the desk chair being slid in place. A journal moves briefly into view before disappearing out of frame again. With the volume as high as it will go, there is barely the whisper of movement--the muted drag of chair legs on the floor and a book being slid back into place on the shelf. Then, another shadow, the curtains being displaced. So that's how Will found his way inside.

It isn't until the third night that Hannibal is afforded a better view, as the latch of the back door moves on its own, swings inward, and closes again without a soul in sight. Hannibal's heart rate rarely rises above the mid 80s outside of exercise. Yet watching as a butcher knife pulls itself from the block and turns idly in the air, then slides back into place, his pulse pounds wildly in his throat, and his mind races, torn between disbelief and fascination.

Throughout the rest of the videos there are only a handful of instances where Hannibal is afforded a view of Will's wanderings. It is Will, casually intruding upon Hannibal's space, rifling through his private notes and handling his belongings as if they were his own, a shivering intimacy. Of that, there is no doubt in Hannibal's mind. He has never been one to discount any possible outcome based on probability.

Life is full of wonder and mystery, and Will Graham is easily the most wonderful and mysterious aspect thus far, in Hannibal's experience. And speaking of possibility, this opens a whole new world for his perusal. He is delighted at just how thoroughly he's underestimated Will, in all his magnificence--it makes things far more interesting. As he considers this, Hannibal wanders through the same space Will has occupied within the last twenty-four hours, observing the changes he's made in Hannibal's home, as his nebulous thoughts begin to take place. Hannibal goes to his harpsichord, allowing them to bloom along with the melody he composes.

In the face of Will's sudden friendliness, Hannibal has been forced to consider that Will no longer wants to see him incarcerated. That perhaps Will would only be satisfied with Hannibal's death, by his hand and no other. But Will has been here, has observed Hannibal when he was alone and, to such a formidable opponent, defenseless. Will has been afforded every opportunity to kill Hannibal himself, return to the hospital unnoticed with no one the wiser. What better alibi than being locked away?

Yet, with all his remarkable power, Will has instead chosen to engage in this, frankly flirtatious, dance. That leaves Hannibal with a stifling, hollow sensation in his chest, unidentifiable at first, until gradually he grows aware of the strain his cheek from the force of his smile. He makes a notation on his sheet music, the ink of his fountain pen blossoming as it saturates the paper. In his mind's eye, Hannibal observes it as the petals of the cherry blossom unfurling.

Well, two can play at that game.

Perhaps it is time to see Will released from his cell legitimately.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

> Borrowing some dialogue from the show again for a few scenes, though we're quickly getting to a point where the plot will diverge too far from that of the show to continue with that...
>
> Thanks as always to my dear sherlocks-freebitch for being the major cause and driving force behind this fic, and being an endless source of inspiration, ILU!

Jack doesn't bother waiting until morning to come for him. Will is dragged out of his cell in the early hours before dawn, transferred to one of the boxes.

"You're moving smoothly and slowly, Jack, carrying your concentration like a brimming cup," Will observes, of his slow, somber procession down the stairs, trailing behind the guard.

"Hannibal Lecter was attacked tonight." Jack's eyes bore into him, as if he could read Will's guilt and bring it to the light by sheer force of will alone. "By an employee of this hospital. An attendant we believe killed the bailiff and judge in your trial."

Will hums thoughtfully, hands behind his back, almost at attention. "He killed the bailiff," he corrects. "He didn't kill the judge. That was the Chesapeake Ripper."

Jack's lips work like he wants to snarl or shout in frustration. He shifts his weight from one leg to the other, hands on hips, and demands, "The Ripper? Now you're saying the Copycat is the Ripper? You know this?"

Will shrugs. "Brown confirmed my suspicions."

"And then you told him to kill Hannibal Lecter."

"Did he say that, Jack?" Will asks, smiling disingenuously.

"He hasn't said much," Jack says. "But Abel Gideon overheard the two of you having a whispered conversation yesterday, and you don't seem too surprised or broken up over the attack."

Will can read the long nights of lost sleep in Jack's posture. His worry for Will and his own wife, feelings of guilt and helplessness and muted rage bubbling just under the surface and pushed down over and over. His strength is lagging. Once, Will would have felt pity, but it's something he can no longer muster, standing on the other side of these bars.

“There is a common emotion we all recognize and have not yet named. The happy anticipation of being able to feel contempt,” Will says.

Jack quirks a brow. “You have contempt for Hannibal?”

“It wasn’t Hannibal to which I was referring,” Will says, and waits while the feeling of uncertainty to take hold in Jack’s mind at the implication. “I have contempt for the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“That’s quite a change of tune from the last time we spoke.”

“The wonders of therapy.”

“Are you saying you no longer believe Hannibal to be the Copycat?”

Will rolls his eyes derisively in Jack’s direction, as if to say *keep up*. “It hardly matters what I think anyway, does it Jack?”

“I’m here aren’t I? You wanted my attention and now you’ve got it. Tell me about the Ripper.” Jack wants an answer that he can believe. He’s desperate for it, but Will is done with trying to please him.

“What is the first and principal thing he does? What need does he serve by killing? Under the guise of the Copycat, it was to engage with me, and eventually, frame me for his murders. But as the Ripper…”

“He harvests organs,” Jack says, following the line of thought but not quite reaching the proper conclusion. He doesn’t have the same depth of vision as Will.

“No. That's only the action of what he does. Why does he need to do it? The Ripper kills in sounders of three or four, in quick order. Do you know why?” Jack’s annoyance and frustration are mounting, and Will revels in it. “I know why.”

Jack relents with a sigh. “Tell me.”

“Because if he waits too long, then the meat spoils.”

“You think he’s eating them. You think *Hannibal Lecter* is eating them.”

“Considering his unusual culinary tastes and his skill as a surgeon, you can understand how I might have thought so, in my fevered state."

“But not anymore.” Jack watches him through narrowed eyes.

Will laughs, a brief, brittle burst of sound that struggles free of his throat, past the pained grimace stretching his lips. Shoulders dropped, he turns away from Jack to lean against the side of his cage. “The Ripper benefited as much from my accusations against Hannibal as he did from framing me. But he’s still out there, and he’s going to keep killing.”

It's incredibly satisfying to watch Jack processing it, the micro-expressions of disbelief, horror, and burgeoning awareness. To think, all this time Will just needed to say it wasn't Hannibal to finally get Jack to see the truth. He manages to swallow back the near-hysterical laughter this time.

"The only question is," Will says, into the expansive silence, "how many more people are going to die before you realise I'm not your man."

Jack won't ever find his proof now; that window has passed, and Will delights in the fact that he will no longer be the one carrying the weight of bleak reality on his shoulders. Some distant day, Jack may finally understand, and then he'll have no one to blame but himself for letting Hannibal Lecter slip through his fingers.

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Hannibal has taken the day off from his practice, ostensibly to recover from the attack. It gives him time to consider his next move, Sheldon Isley, the first rondo of his sonata. The foundations of this particular composition have already been laid, or perhaps it might be better to say sown. The theme will require some development, a ponderous exposition leading inevitably back to Miriam Lass's freedom, and Will's.

Alana drops in to check on him in the early afternoon to check in on him. Her eyes dart over him assessing. Hannibal can feel where they linger on the bare skin of his wrists, sleeves rolled back as he prepares lunch. Brown must has divulged at least some of his plans. She looks as though she's barely restraining the urge to reach out and touch.

"Just because the attack didn't leave you with any lasting physical damage doesn't mean it hasn't left you with scars." She does touch then, brushing her fingers along the place where he'd bear bruises, had Brown managed to string him up.

Hannibal rolls his shoulders once Alana has sat back in her seat. "I'll admit, I have imagined that noose around my neck, though it's yet to drive me to the point of nightmares. I'm more concerned for that troubled young man. Perhaps he can finally receive the help he so desperately needs."

Alana shakes her head, hair falling loose around her face, veiling the rueful smile that twists her lips. "That's certainly an optimistic attitude for someone who had an attempt made on his life less than twenty-four hours ago."

"It's not the first time," Hannibal says. "Part and parcel with working alongside the FBI."

"I'm not only talking about the attack. You've been betrayed by someone you thought to be a friend. That's going to be traumatic for anyone, Hannibal, even you. Don't make the mistake I do, acting as your own psychiatrist."

Alana's earnest, conciliatory kindness is one of her more endearing qualities. Hannibal's gaze traces the curve of her cheek, and he considers how soft it would feel under his palm, tucking

back her hair. How dramatically different from the rough grain of Will's scruff. She is all inviting sweetness to Will's prickly bitterness, overall a far pleasanter companion, and yet Hannibal finds himself longing for Will's presence across the island in her place, in all his recalcitrance.

"I appreciate your concern, and Jack's, however unwarranted," Hannibal says. "I prefer to heed the sage advice of Confucius: 'It is more shameful to distrust our friends than to be deceived by them.'"

"You like to see the good in everyone," Alana says. "I didn't want to believe it could be true, either, that Will could be capable of such a thing, but we can't keep our heads buried in the sand."

"Will and I know where we stand with one another. Until there is evidence to support Will's involvement, I will not blame him for the actions taken by Brown."

"Hannibal--" pained humour mingled with dismay. Alana can be tenacious, but she knows when it will do her no good. "You have to find a way to deal with what happened to you."

Hannibal flashes her a boyish grin. "I'm metabolizing the experience by composing a new piece of music.

"Ah. Harpsichord or theremin?" Oh, how casually she drops her intimate knowledge of him, as if to say *I've noticed* and *notice me*.

Hannibal has the beginnings of an idea as to how she might be useful to him in his current endeavour. "Harpsichord," he says. "Perhaps I'll play it for you when I've finished."

Alana laughs, a tinkling, charmed sound. She smiles at him from behind the curtain of her hair. "I'd love to hear it."

Hannibal takes up his glass of wine and her beer, passing it to her has he comes around the other side of the island. He crafts an expression of mingled consternation and dismay, covered by the twist of his lips. It works perfectly, Alana laying her hand on his arm in concern. "Are you sure you're alright."

"Would you care to come to dinner this evening?" Hannibal asks. Hesitance and vulnerability, and Alana responds predictably. "I could use the company--I prefer it to being alone in my head with my thoughts."

"I have to go by the hospital later--Jack wants me to talk to Will, for all the good that's going to do. Chilton's throwing around his weight, put me off until eight."

"After, then," Hannibal says. Even better. Imagining her going to visiting Will dressed up for her dinner date. Whatever this game is that Will has been playing, Hannibal can't imagine he'll be pleased by the knowledge. "Help me get back my appetite."

Alana raises her glass in agreement.

*

The day crawls by. It would be interminable, if not for Will's ability to retreat into the stream in his mind. Abigail, his constant companion these days, is uncharacteristically quiet. Will can feel her gaze boring into the back of his head, fairly radiating with an air of *what are you hoping to accomplish with all of this?*

It's sobering, in the face of his glee, over all the rush of emotion he's experienced these past few days in Hannibal's unwitting company. Her presence lurks just behind him, reminding him of what happened to Abigail when she tried to play Hannibal's game. What Hannibal did with her remains, in order to place him here.

There are many things left between them to resolve, and Will only grows more impatient, mood souring with each hour that passes and Hannibal does not show. After Jack, Chilton rambles at him for a good hour or so, before he's left to stew in his cage. Chilton comes around a few times more over the course of the day, and in between his visits, Abel Gideon keeps up a running dialogue with Will's silence.

Twenty minutes before the end of visiting hours, Gideon drawls, "I don't think he's coming," and Will swallows back a curse.

After dinner, there is the sound of faint voices on the stairs and the grate of the barred door opening at the end of the hall. There's a stirring of hope in Will's chest until he hears the click of heels approaching, and Alana is heralded by the cloud of delicate perfume she wears. Will's nose might not be as sensitive as Hannibal's, but he catches a hint of jasmine and sandalwood.

His disappointment must show, no matter how he tries to rein it in. Alana tilts her head back as she comes to a stop before his cell, hands on her hips. There's a chair against the wall, but she doesn't draw it up, remaining standing instead.

"Alana." Will lets the name roll from his tongue.

"Will." A tightness to her voice, anger constricting his name in her throat. Will can hardly expect any other reaction from her, not when she's already condemned him in her mind for crimes he did not commit. At least this is one he's guilty of. "You look as though you were expecting someone else."

He sits up on his cot to get a better look at her. Hair styled a bit differently than usual, more curl and volume, eyeliner darker, lips a shade he's never seen on her, deep reddish brown like dried blood. As impeccable as she always looks, this is a step beyond. His eyes narrow in consideration.

"You can't honestly have thought Hannibal was going to stop by, after what you did."

Even without his skills of observation, it would be clear that Alana has dressed herself for a date. It stirs a similar emotion in Will as he'd felt watching Brown and Hannibal together. That fierce desire to insinuate himself between them. His lip curls back in disdain, and Will catches himself and schools the expression into something blandly inoffensive before it can fully form.

“It must be exhausting for you.”

Alana comes up short at that, but recovers quickly. “What’s that?”

“Forever looking for some new victim to champion for. Poor broken Will, a nice, safe project for you. Tragically orphaned Abigail. And now Hannibal. I suppose the two of you can commiserate over your loss. They say that funeral sex is incredibly intense--that liberation from grief.”

Through the curtain of her hair, Alana’s dark eyes are almost unreadable, but Will can still see the thoughts racing through her mind. Almost tripping over themselves to convince her that this isn’t what’s happening between Hannibal and herself. That she’s not taking advantage of the situation, and that it’s not the only reason Hannibal would allow it.

“Don’t worry, I’m sure you two have plenty other reasons, besides funeral ones.”

Alana juts out her chin and crosses her arms over her chest, then seems to catch herself and lets them hang loose at her side again. “My relationship with Hannibal, whatever it may be, isn’t any of your business, Will. I might be inclined to discuss it with a friend, but you gave up any right you may have had when you tried to have Hannibal killed!”

Will takes a moment to appreciate how she looks when she’s indignant. Never one to get worked up on her own behalf, but oh how her eyes catch fire when she’s leaping to someone else’s defense. The pink that rises in the apple of her cheeks. She draws herself up, her presence taking up more space that she physically occupies. Certainly she was lovely in all her softness, but he thinks he prefers this sharper version.

If only she could retain this edge. Learn to watch the whole world through the lens of mistrust she has for him now. In the end, it would only put her in greater danger, to see Hannibal for what he truly is. Better then for it to pass, evaporating under her sunny disposition.

“What were you hoping to accomplish, with this little visit?” Will asks. His face screws up tight, eyebrows drawn together before he can stop himself. He’s never been particularly good at keeping what he’s thinking hidden. He’s never particularly cared. It’s a new practice, this subterfuge he’s begun thanks to Hannibal.

Alana huffs a breath. “I guess I just had to see for myself. I couldn’t believe it, when Jack told me. I thought he had to be wrong. But you’re not even bothering to try to deny it.”

Will lunges forward, hands braced against the bar, face wedged between them. “What good would that do me, Alana? Why would you believe me now, when I’ve already told you I’m not the Copycat? You’re unwilling to see what’s right in front of you.”

“No, I see what’s in front of me clearly, for the first time,” Alana says, swallowing back her emotion. Will scoffs. “Goodbye Will.” She hesitates, as though she’s still waiting for his denial, in spite of their exchange. When none is forthcoming, she turns, unsteady on her heels for a brief second before righting herself and striding back the way she came.

It's almost physically painful to wait the remaining ten minutes or so before the end of visiting hours. Then the lights down the hallway flicker off one at a time, leaving the hall cast in the eerie green glow of the runner lights reflected off the walls.

Will knows he's taking a risk to leave so soon after lights out. The guards don't pay much attention to the contents of the cell when making their rounds, but with the other inmates still awake, he could draw attention to himself even in his invisibility. Gideon in particular with his keen interest in Will's business, might notice the sound of his cell opening, his bare feet treading on the floor.

Being honest with himself, Will can't even pretend it's out of concern for Alana that he's going. Hannibal wouldn't risk harming her, not with the FBIs attention on him. No, it's the same impetus that had him clinging to the armrest of the lifeguard tower, to throw himself in the water after Hannibal's sinking form. To throw himself between them, teeth bared like an animal, proclaiming Mine!

So he tells himself silent, silent, like you're not even there as he disrobes, watching his skin disappear as if he's shedding his skin and there's nothing inside. He bundles the uniform up under the covers and arranges it just so, then crosses the cell on tiptoes. Silent, a mantra in his head, you're not even there, and when he reaches for the loose stone behind which he's hidden the key, and his hand slips through the brick as if it weren't there.

Will gasps, but there's no sound at all. There's nothing to see but brick, no hand to examine, and when he tries again, his hand passes through once more. The sensation is similar to that of a body of water, the current of which gently drags sand and sediment against the skin, only from inside. Tugging at muscle and bone and blood vessel. He has to will himself visible again to reassure himself he still can, that he hasn't turned into a ghost, and when he does, fingers pressed solid against the rough brick hard enough to turn the skin red, all the breath leaves him.

There's time enough to consider what this means later. How he wasted most of his life pretending he didn't have this ability, instead of pushing and testing to see just what he was capable of. If he allows himself to travel down that path now, he could get lost within.

The key is left where it is. Will goes through the bars with that same liquid sensation, only this time it's icy cold, the smooth and slippery, with a metallic taste left in his mouth. It's unsettling, but rather than dissuading him from doing it again, it has much the opposite result. He finds himself wanting to try it over and over, to pass through other objects and experience the differences in texture, taste, and scent between them.

When he reaches the ground floor, having devoted conscious effort to going up the stairs without slipping through them, Will takes solid form again in the guard's locker room. It's another risk, stealing car keys and a change of clothes. At night, the gate is automated, and the only way anyone will know the car came and went is if they bother to check the records of card swipes. Or if someone notices.

But the trip is uneventful. Will dresses once he's visible again, a few blocks away from the hospital, and drives nine miles over the limit the whole way, eyes darting back and forth for

any sign of traffic police. When he drives past Hannibal's street to park the next one over, he sees Alana's car in the driveway.

For a moment, Will is stymied as to how to gain entrance, with the front door locked, and the two of them in the kitchen. Through the frost and condensation on the glass panes of the French doors, Will can see Alana leaning against the island. It's a place he's occupied himself more times than he can count, and she looks entirely at home with one of Hannibal's home brewed beers in hand and his apron over her dress.

Another attractive embellishment on Hannibal's carefully crafted mask of normality. The successful, attractive, intelligent woman to hang from his words and his arm. Will wants nothing more than to see that mask crack and splinter, as he saw the beginnings of with Brown. The fever is gone, but Will thinks that maybe, just maybe, he might still see to the truth of what lurks beneath. A creature that has haunted his dreams for weeks now, not out of fear of what it might do, but what it might mean about him.

Will lunges toward them in an abortive movement of protest, expecting to be caught against the door, and almost curses in surprise when he stumbles on through--his new skill will take some getting used to. Both Alana and Hannibal pause and glance in his direction, though Will is certain he's made no noise. Curiously, a hint of a smile teases at Hannibal's mouth.

Alana turns back to the cutting board on the butcher's block before her. "He didn't even bother trying to deny it," she says, shaking her head. The basil is already sliced into neat ribbons, but she keeps fussing with it. "I don't know why that surprised me."

Hannibal wears a speculative look. His fingers are nimble, rolling small red morsels of meat in flour. Will is transfixed at the movement of Hannibal's skin over delicate bones, the vivid blue of the veins in his wrist. Before he has time to think about it, Will's reaching out to ghost his fingers along the place Brown meant to cut. He never makes contact, but a shiver runs through Hannibal all the same, and the fine hairs of his forearm stand on end.

"Perhaps Will knew that for you, his guilt was a foregone conclusion," Hannibal muses, running an absent thumb across the same spot.

She sets the knife aside, picks up her beer, then puts it down again without taking a drink. "It was like a stranger was staring back at me from behind my friend's eyes."

"I imagine Will feels much the same way, seeing all his friends and colleagues turning on him, one after the other."

"All except for you," Alana says ruefully. "The one who keeps standing up for him. The one he keeps trying to kill."

"Alana," Hannibal rubs his hands dry after rinsing them in the sink, and comes around to rest them on Alana's shoulders. More than friendly, but not necessarily suggestive of anything else. "It's natural, to try to make sense of the senseless, particularly when it affects someone we consider a friend, but you can't allow it to drive you mad. I'd rather not lose a second friend to Chilton's care."

Will can't miss the twitch of disappointment that crosses Alana's face at the word friend, but she recovers quickly, huffing with amusement at Hannibal's words. "I'm open to any suggestions on how to turn it off." She glances up at Hannibal from under her lashes, and the implication is clear.

Hannibal strokes a hand down from her shoulder to elbow before parting from Alana to turn back to the food. "For now, perhaps you can select a wine to accompany dinner?"

Alana bites her lip and hesitates for a moment, as though she's considering saying something more. When she disappears into the open pantry, Will is taken with the urge to follow after and show her the undeniable proof that she's so far ignored. He's caught off-guard by the realisation that he might possibly be willing to sacrifice her safety for his own satisfaction at being proven right, but no. The moment for Alana to believe him has passed. He doubts the thought of who she might be dining on this evening has given her a second's pause, after Will's accusations.

Instead, Will goes into the dining room, where Hannibal has already set the table. The sliding switch on the wall is down low. It makes it seem smaller, drenched in shadow, with the table in the soft island of light. There are two taper candles ready to be lit, and an overflowing centrepiece that, along with the lighting, gives the impression of a much smaller table.

Will has never dined with Hannibal alone in his home, and there's an undeniable feeling of intimacy in the arrangement. Hannibal forgoing his seat at the head of the table sit directly across from Alana. Their eyes meeting across flickering candlelight, engaging in silent, suggestive conversation. Alana's lashes dipping playfully, and the quirk of a smile at Hannibal's lips.

What does it mean, that Will has never been a guest alone at Hannibal's home? Did Hannibal fear what Will would have seen, with all of his undivided attention? The truth behind all of Hannibal's dreadful puns, and the pride of achievement, pulling the wool over Will's eyes, as he dined on those he failed to protect by allowing the Ripper to continue to roam free.

Scowling, Will makes quick work of rearranging the place settings. Hannibal's at his usual place at the head of the table, and Alana at the opposite end, on the far side of the ostentatious arrangement of purple and red chrysanthemums and seed pods, woven through with antler, barely visible over the tips of pheasant feathers.

It feels small and petty, as does cranking the heat all the way up to 80, but that doesn't stop Will from doing either. Alana's confused mou is worth it, when she brings in the wine to decant and stares at the setting. When Hannibal comes in, he resets the table without so much as a wrinkle of confusion marring his brow. A fissure of suspicion creeps up Will's spine, at how easily Hannibal adapts, not missing a step.

Dinner turns out to be tender morsels of heart, breaded and stuffed with herbed butter. Will rolls his eyes at the heavy-handedness of it all, and Alana's comment about feeling broken-hearted in the wake of this new betrayal.

They spend most of the meal discussing their work. As of late, Will has found himself questioning Alana's competency. Even without his accusations, how she missed the fact that

Hannibal is practically a walking checklist of how to spot a psychopath is a wonder, and now she has steadfastly refused to even consider the possibility.

Watching the two of them together, Will has to wonder as to Hannibal's motivation in mentoring Alana. Another of his experiments, to set her loose on patients and see what happened? No intentional malice on her part, of course, but damaging all the same.

As for having her to dinner this evening, it's clear Hannibal is up to something, likely in response to Will's insistence of his guilt. Just who is he planning to frame next, and what role does Alana play in that?

Whatever Hannibal has in store for her, he isn't making his move tonight. Halfway through the meal they both begin to feel the consequence of Will's fussing with the thermostat. A fine sheen of sweat dots Alana's forehead and she keeps tossing back her hair, lifting it from her neck, and fanning herself. Hannibal takes this in stride, as well--Will can read his discomfort in the small shifts of his body and twitches of his facial features, though he doesn't tug at his collar or shed his jacket. No, far too refined for that.

Will isn't precisely going to take credit for putting a damper on the mood, but Alana is too physically uncomfortable to focus on the thread of their conversation, let alone flirting. Though disappointment flits over her face when Hannibal sees her to the door with nothing more than a quick, friendly squeeze of a hug, Alana still shows visible relief to slip into the cool winter night.

There is no sign of dismay on *Hannibal's* face at how the evening has come to a close. When he makes his way down the hall and checks the thermostat, he doesn't even look surprised to see it has been adjusted. He dials it back down, and discards his jacket, laying it over the back of a chair and turns to clearing the table.

For a moment, Will watches Hannibal tidying, all elegant efficiency in his movements. Knowing that Alana is gone, and safe, should be enough for him, but that tight feeling in Will's chest hasn't dissipated. Alana's appearance at his cell might have fanned the flames, but he has to acknowledge that she was never the cause for his visit tonight. That was the burgeoning desire to be close to Hannibal, warring with the desire to see him suffer, at least a little.

With no clear plan in mind, Will wanders through the house. Not disturbing this time, merely observing and considering. When he comes into Hannibal's bedroom, his dream springs to the forefront of his mind, in vivid detail. Having Hannibal spread beneath him on those expensive sheets, entirely at Will's mercy.

Arousal surges hot through Will's veins, burning away the eerie ephemeral sensation he has associated with this form. It pulses straight to his cock, already half-hard from the memory and the scent of Hannibal that hangs over the room, occupying this private space that Alana so clearly wishes to inhabit.

Jealousy, possessiveness, and lust have him crawling on top of the sheets again, trailing his own scent there. Will rolls onto his back, head rested on Hannibal's pillow, and brings his hand up to his chest and down the line of his stomach, leaving a shivery path.

It’s incredibly strange, unused to thinking about his physical form when he’s invisible, to feel his fingertips brushing against the base of his cock without being able to see. His eyes flutter shut, and that’s more familiar. Will takes himself in hand with a soundless groan. He strokes once up and down before tightening his grip.

Fuck, he’s already so wet, precome leaking fast at the thought of Hannibal smelling this and the effect it might have on him. He isn’t usually one to race to the finish when he isn’t pressed for time, but Will’s been locked in a cage for weeks, and he’s so turned on he can’t help it. Feet braced against the comforter, hips working into his fist, chasing after the pleasure, heedless of the burn of friction or the sounds he’s making when downstairs he can hear the clatter of plates and running water.

Usually Will’s memory feels like a curse, but right now, being able to recall the dream as if it were real, feeling Hannibal’s body solid and real beneath him, slippery with blood, and the way they’d crashed together, it’s far more welcome. Will sees the feral expression Hannibal wore when he’d squared off against Brown, the slipping of his mask, and he wants it directed at him. No more of this false politeness, no more dancing around what both of them know to be the truth. He wants all of Hannibal’s ugly, hurtful honesty.

When he licks his lips, Will can taste the salt of Hannibal’s skin as if it were real. He can smell the copper and sweat, and sex thick on the air. Will’s orgasm is ripped from him, each forceful pulse shaking through his limbs, until he’s left slumped boneless and weak against the mattress.

Coming down from that high in the still, cool blue of Hannibal’s room, Will has to face the sobering fact that it’s all just a fantasy. Every exchange is in his mind alone, and Hannibal has given no indication of his own desire for Will, at least not sexually. Is he even interested in anything so mundane--so human--or does he view their connection as transcending the physical? From his own mouth, Hannibal’s wish is to see Will know himself, nothing more than that.

With these thoughts chasing their way through his head, Will clambers to shaky legs. He wipes himself down with a towel from the bathroom and glances in the mirror, momentarily startled to find it empty. He lets out a trembling, humourless laugh that seems to fall, echoless to the floor.

Brown was a gift, and Hannibal’s failure to visit, while understandable, has left Will entirely off-balance. Until he can speak to Hannibal directly, Will can’t know where they stand. Will’s reflection flickers briefly into view, he’s so overtaken with the need to confront Hannibal right here and now, but common sense wins out, and then he’s gone again.

Hannibal will come to see him, there’s no doubt in his mind. Regardless of the exact nature of his feelings towards Will, he won’t be able to help himself.

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There is an irrepressible smile pulling at the muscles of Hannibal’s face as he finishes the dishes, and he has no desire to fight it. Will’s efforts were sophomoric, at best, but Hannibal

is charmed nonetheless. To know that Will has no desire to see him harmed nor incarcerated is one thing, but to see evidence of his jealousy is another entirely.

He can't even muster any annoyance at the fact that his evening with Alana did not go to plan. Laying the groundwork for seduction is the means to an end, but Will's interference could change things. The avenues of opportunity presented by Will's ability are endless, and Hannibal finds himself delighting at the unpredictability of it all.

Whether his suspicions regarding Will's interest in him turn out to be true or not, Hannibal is willing to allow his plans to be shaped by whatever it is Will has in store for him. Only fair, after all, to see the creature his machinations has wrought.

Such thoughts are brought to a grinding halt when Will's scent returns--Hannibal thought he'd gone when Alana had--but now it's all around him, stronger than before. The unmistakable musky odor beneath the sharp alkaloid sting of ejaculate. Entirely unprepared and overwhelmed, Hannibal can't swallow back the groan it evokes. He can almost *taste* Will on his tongue, and his mouth waters.

In answer, the air around him seems to shimmer, as with the late afternoon sun on a desert highway. Will's longing made tangible. There's no sound at all, not even the soft pad of Will's feet, almost indiscernible, or the susurration of skin on skin. Even the currents of air are undisturbed, but Hannibal knows Will is close by. He can sense Will's eyes on him.

His decision to put on a show is spur of the moment, and undoubtedly out of character. Despite his general lack of interest in maintaining a sexual relationship, Hannibal has never attempted to deny his baser physical needs. All the same, there's something almost obscene about considering doing this here, in the kitchen, where he regularly prepares food for Baltimore's wealthiest. But Will must have known Hannibal would smell the evidence of his action, and Hannibal can't resist the temptation. Was this what Will had hoped to achieve?

The room is miserable with humidity and overheated thanks to Will's antics. Plenty of excuse for Hannibal to tug free his tie and undo another button or two. He rocks his hips against the cabinet front, just the slightest pressure against his growing erection, and tips back his head to inhale more deeply of Will's aroma.

Hannibal turns to rest against the edge of the sink. The placket of his dress slacks juts out with the shape of his cock. He runs his palm back and forth over the length, gives a squeeze and groans, more at the thought of Will watching him than anything else. Is he growing aroused again? Will he stay to watch, touch himself as well, or retreat in shame? Oh, Hannibal hopes it's one of the former.

When he drags down his zipper, slow and purposeful, Hannibal would swear he hears a sharp intake of air. He bites the inside of his lip against another grin, spreads his slacks open wide and eases them just over the jut of his hips.

Unusual, this degree of arousal, heating the back of his neck and up his scalp, not even having touched himself properly. Never so overtaken with need as to flip open the button of his boxers and free his cock, without undressing properly. He wraps a damp hand around himself, slowly easing back the foreskin to bare the head.

What would Will be doing now, if Hannibal could see him? If they weren't playing this game, if they were entirely honest with one another? The thought of Will touching him--hesitant fingers brushing skin at first, uncertain at the feel of another man's cock solid in his hand. Of Will on his knees, curls fisted in Hannibal's fingers, twisted cruelly, and the shape of his lips stretched over Hannibal's cock, the rumbled moan of pleasure vibrating between them.

Hannibal pitches forward a step and catches himself one-handed on the edge of the island. He tightens his fist and gives over to the fantasy of having Will beneath him. The twist of his spine, the give of his body. His orgasm takes him entirely by surprise, quaking up his legs, tense in his gluteal muscles.

It's Will's name on his lips when Hannibal comes in hot ribbons that splatter against the cabinet front. He's going to have to sanitise the whole room after this. Oh but it's worth it, when he feels the cool, whisper of sensation at the back of his neck like the trailing of invisible fingertips. Hannibal arches into the touch, hips thrusting forward to chase those last pulses of pleasure.

For a moment, Hannibal imagines he can sense Will wavering on the edge of visibility, longing to reach out for a more solid touch. That tell-tale scent of arousal, discernibly different from Hannibal's, is even stronger now. Hannibal draws in a deep breath, and given the opportunity, he could trace it to the source. He'd pin Will down, visible or not. But the scent is already fading, and that sixth sense that raises his vellus hair is gone.

There are other priorities that demand Hannibal's attention. A councilman half-grafted to a cherry blossom tree, and the carefully crafted trail of breadcrumbs that will lead Jack back to the source. Only now, he must consider altering his message.

An olive branch and invitation in one, evident only for his intended.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It would be fair to say that Will's plan backfired. Shivering in the dark of his bunk at the asylum, aroused and confused and humming with energy that wants to drive him back through the bars and across town. Will closes his eyes and he's in Hannibal's kitchen again, fingers clenched tight around the edge of the island counter as he watches.

This time he doesn't *only* watch. This time he lets out the shuddering breath he's held and reaches out to place a hand in the bare hollow of Hannibal's neck. Feels the quickening pulse under sweat-damp skin, and the catch in Hannibal's throat at Will's touch. His name nothing more than an exhalation stirring on the air between them. Will pushing him back against the sink, the press of their overheated bodies together, with only Hannibal's clothing between them, and Will reaching down to cover Hannibal's hand with his own…

Will stifles a groan of mingled arousal and frustration, and rolls over. The springs of the bunk echo his groan back to him in protest.

"Trouble sleeping?" Gideon calls out, and this time Will's groan is one of annoyance. "I have to admit, it's a bit of a relief--I was beginning to worry with how quiet you've been this evening. Still and silent as the dead."

Will can't help the way his tone mirrors Gideon's, drawing out his vowels, the words rolling from his tongue. "It's not my well-being you should be worried about. *You* should have killed the Ripper when you had the chance."

"Shoulda. Coulda. Woulda."

"How does it feel, having been marked with an expiration date?"

"The Chesapeake Ripper can't get me in here."

"Oh, I wouldn't be so sure." Will has no doubt in his mind that Hannibal has a plan for Gideon. If anything, Will's served him up on a silver platter, having him placed in the cell next door. At the time, Will had thought of it as a trap. Whether he convinced Gideon to divulge what happened that night in Hannibal's home, or Hannibal fell for the bait and came to take Gideon, it didn't much matter.

Under the cover of dark, Will allows his mind to wander down a different path. A scenario neither Hannibal nor Gideon would ever dream up. After all, he no longer wants to see Hannibal behind bars, and there are only a few ways forward that don't end with the net he's carefully laid through accusations and insinuations tightening inexorably around Hannibal.

A scapegoat. And who better than Chilton, with his growing suspicion, his own medical background, Gideon's psychic driving. That's who Hannibal would go after.

Jack won't buy it unless Hannibal has an ironclad alibi, and suddenly all the pieces slide together. The dinner with Alana tonight as groundwork for his coming seduction. Will rubs the heels of his hands against his closed eyes, digging into the sockets. He can already see her posture of offense, the fierce expression when Jack comes knocking to ask about Hannibal's whereabouts when Gideon goes missing.

"Smoke and shadow, Gideon," he whispers. "He slips in unseen, and by the time you realise he's there, it's too late." It sounds too much like a personal threat to his own ears.

"Do you hope to frighten an apology from me?" Gideon asks. "When it's Frederick who should be worried at this juncture?"

An unbidden smile tugs at Will's mouth. It feels like an expression belonging to someone else. "I don't want an apology from you. Just reminding you of your mistakes."

"Trying to find your taste for it, aren't you Mister Graham, but it doesn't sit well on your palette, does it?"

Will sits upright, back to the wall, and he can imagine Gideon in a similar position just now, the two of them back to back. He turns his head, rolls his eyes to the side, and can see the outline of Gideon's profile in his periphery. "Taste for what? Blood?"

"It's like copper on the tongue. Not your flavour."

"I'd stick to dissecting the body, not the mind," Will drawls. "You're about as clumsy as Frederick, and as far from the mark."

There's a long, heavy pause from Gideon. Reflective, surprised. "You brought me here," he begins, starting off unsteadily but gaining confidence in his words as he speaks, "to bear witness. To tell Jack Crawford that I sat in Hannibal Lecter's cobalt blue dining room? An ostentatious herb garden, *Leda and the Swan* over the fireplace. And you, having a fit in the corner. That's where I asked him if he was the Chesapeake Ripper, and he avoided the question by suggesting I kill Alana Bloom."

Will lets himself slip even deeper into Gideon's relaxed posture and dialect, flutters his eyes closed and doesn't think about the words before he says them, just reflects Gideon back at himself. "You've never set foot in Hannibal Lecter's house, Abel. You only just met the man last week. Did Doctor Chilton tell you the details of his dining room?"

Now the silence is resounding and stretches for an eternity. When Gideon does speak again, Will detects a hint of grudging respect that wasn't there before. "Perhaps I've underestimated you, Mister Graham."

Perhaps they all have--Gideon, Alana, Jack, Hannibal. But worst of all, Will, spending the last thirty years living a self-fulfilling prophecy, built around his father's fear. Telling himself he wasn't different, he wasn't something other, something inhuman, and ignoring every whisper in the back of his mind telling him otherwise.

What might he have become, if his mother never left? Would it resemble this thing he's slowly becoming, thanks to Hannibal's machinations? He doesn't have any answers--for all his understanding of the internal workings of the mind of others, his own right now is a mystery. Will sees each possible path stretching out before him, and has no idea which he'll take, from one minute to the next. It should frighten him, but it doesn't.

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In the morning, Will is led to the cages to receive a visitor. Though he has his hopes and suspicions over who has come to visit him, he still hadn't anticipated the melange of emotions that sweep through him when he hears the footfalls on the stairs. Even with his eyes closed, Will knows that tread. His hands tighten on the bars. Relief and satisfaction, followed swiftly by the uglier, ever-present anger over his betrayal. It fades a little more each day, no matter how Will tries to cling to it, sand dragging through his clenched fingers with the tide.

"Doctor Lecter."

Will opens his eyes, shakes his head to clear it of images of shadow and antler. Standing before him neat and tidy as ever, this Hannibal is so far removed from the memory of last night that it's almost difficult to reconcile the two. Will absently pushes back his hair, heel of his hand pressed to his forehead to check that he's not feverish, that it hadn't all been some hallucination.

Hannibal watches him through narrow eyes, head tilted just so. It's a familiar expression, from their time in therapy. He licks his lips before he speaks, the briefest flash of tongue and Will is flushed all over, back in the damp heat of the kitchen, with Hannibal undone before him and Will's name on his lips.

"Will." He has to fight the urge to shudder at hearing it now. Hannibal passes his coat from one hand to the other, a calculated fidget, before straightening his shoulders and meeting Will's gaze head on. "I feel as though I've been watching our relationship on a split screen. The friendship I perceived on one side, and the truth on the other."

"Sounds disconcerting," Will says, glib.

To his surprise, Hannibal smiles back, teeth flashing. "You've been lying to me, Will."

"It's impressive," Will says, and waits for Hannibal's arched brow to continue. "The genuine timbre of self-righteous hurt you manage. Then again, you tell your lies so well, maybe you've begun to believe them."

"Alana thinks you sent Matthew Brown to kill me," Hannibal says.

"Alana isn't a very good judge of character," Will mutters.

Hannibal's face gives him away. The slightest uptick to the corner of his lips, there and gone, and the mischievous light in his eyes. "Jack believes it, too."

“But you don’t believe it,” Will breathes. He leans in closer, forehead to the bars, and Hannibal echoes him, crossing over the line on the floor.

“I don’t believe that,” Hannibal agrees. “If it was your intention that I die, you’d have done a better job of it. Under your control, I might just be dead.”

Will’s fingers loosen on the bar and he lets go. He chuckles as he turns to rest against the side of his cage. Hannibal comes even closer still. Hip to the front bars, almost a casual pose for someone like Hannibal Lecter, and there’s an intimacy to their position, even with the cage between them. Will could almost forget where he is if he wanted to, forget who put him here, and let Hannibal charm him with the faintest whisper of a smile, but that wouldn’t serve him in this moment.

“You think I have any control in here?” He can’t even control the way it comes out, almost flirtatious, or the teasing look he shoots Hannibal.

“I think you’re more in control now than you’ve ever been in your life.” Hannibal’s voice is low and piercing, straight into Will’s chest. The same sobering sensation every time Will has blithely challenged Hannibal to see him and know him, and expected him to fail. And once again Hannibal’s hit the mark. Will fights against a shiver when Hannibal continues, “I think if you wanted, you would find a way to reach beyond the bars that hold you to hurt me. But you haven’t. I don’t think that’s your intention at all.”

“How can you know what my intentions are, if even I don’t?” Will tries to inject as much venom into the words as possible, but he knows he sounds more lost than anything else.

Hannibal inhales thoughtfully and holds it for a pregnant moment. “I’ve missed talking with you, Will. I do hope we can resume our conversations when you’re released.”

Will’s grin feels razor sharp. “And thoughts on when might that be?”

Hannibal straightens. He runs the tips of his fingers along a horizontal bar, and Will imagines the touch on the back of his hand, whisper-light. “I do have to run now.” He returns Will’s grin with one of his own, and Will can see the edges of his mask splitting, the darkness that seeps through the cracks. “I’ll give Jack and Alana your best.”

There’s something in his tone, beyond the threat the words hold. A hint of playful challenge, maybe.

Will might have taken more time to ruminate on it, but after lunch, Gideon is led out of his cage by a smug-looking Chilton. As the orderlies lead Gideon to the elevator, Chilton casts Will a narrow, suspicious glare. In their absence, Will imagines what Gideon might be telling him, or Jack. Gideon never follows any agenda but his own, and as far as Will has observed, he does it for his personal amusement. Would it amuse him more, then, to stymie Chilton’s attempt at convincing Jack of Hannibal’s guilt? Or would Gideon prefer to throw a wrench in Will’s plans?

The hours tick by, and Gideon fails to return. Shortly before dinner time an alarm goes off, a dozen pairs of feet running down the corridor and shouts of chaos echoing. Someone yelling

for a nurse. Gideon is wheeled by on a gurney, beaten within an inch of his life, and Will's heart races as he considers how much easier it would be to take Gideon from the medical wing than from his cell. This would be the moment Hannibal was waiting for, which means Will can't afford to wait any longer.

It isn't until the orderlies are picking up the dinner trays when Will hears them joking around about Chilton leaving early to get ready for a party, peacocking around for Doctor Lecter, that he realises just how very perfect the timing is. There can be no question of Hannibal's innocence when Chilton, Jack, and all of Baltimore's elite are rubbing elbows at his party.

But more than Jack's frustration, or Chilton's growing anxiety, Will wishes he could see Hannibal's own expression, when the call comes through to Chilton mid-soirée--that Gideon has been taken. No, Will can't let the opportunity pass him by when it's been practically gift-wrapped.

He must plan it through carefully. The hospital will be on high alert once they notice Gideon missing. They'll search everywhere, so Will must move quickly to be back in his cell before they see he's gone. There's no time to waste.

*

Since that night when he came to find his pantry in disorder, which Hannibal now knows to be Will's first visit, he has taken precautions to ensure that no other unwelcome visitors will stumble upon evidence of his crimes. The pantry cleared of any human remains, the cellar scrubbed from end to end, a thorough cleaning of the trap in the kitchen sink. As much as it pains him to discard any perfectly serviceable meat, he hasn't missed the light of suspicion in Jack's eyes.

Tonight, he'll serve only the finest, legal ingredients to his guests. That isn't to say, he thinks, as he oversees the preparation of the foie gras, that it's any more ethical. If anything, he treats his victims with far more care than much of the food that graces Jack's plate elsewhere. Perhaps that is what sparks the muted outrage, when Jack requests his meal to go. Will's words echo in Hannibal's mind then, wondering at how perfectly he manufactures the emotion.

Thoughts of Will lead to an altogether different set of emotions he's spent a lifetime emulating. Feeling them in actuality, for the first time, has left him adrift. So much so that there is a fissure of doubt at the course he's laid out for the evening. Since hearing from Alana about Gideon's unfortunate fall, it is unquestionably the best time to act, and yet, whether because of Jack's suspicion, or Will's visit, Hannibal finds himself hesitating.

He should find it intolerable. Watching the chaos of Will's actions bleed out through the world has been nothing short of breathtaking, and Hannibal cannot help but allow himself to become entangled in it. To see what Will's chaos will make of him. He's held enthralled.

That is why he'll carry through with his plan after all. To see the fury and jealousy on Will's face, when he's learned that dear, blind Alana has been Hannibal's eager pawn in this. Would that push him to further violence, or something altogether different? Either result Hannibal would gladly receive.

And so he allows Alana to catch his eye from across the room. Returns her coy smile with a roguish grin that makes her falter, lashes dipping low, before hesitantly smiling even wider. Hannibal lays a hand briefly in the small of her back when he passes on his way to the kitchen, and absently pushes her hair back from her shoulder when she comes to compliment him on the meal.

Alana flushes a warm, charming red. Slightly tipsy from the wine, she's got a glow about her, a sparkle to her eyes that makes her all the more beautiful. "I can't believe Jack. That was unforgivably rude."

"He must be thorough at his work," Hannibal says, dismissive. "The sooner he is satisfied of my innocence, the sooner he can return to his search for the true culprit."

"That's rather magnanimous of you, Hannibal." Alana gives him a wry look. "But you don't need to let them walk all over you. You've been patient enough with all of this nonsense. Will's the one who tried to have you killed."

"Alana…" Hannibal strokes the back of his hand against hers, where they clasp their wine glasses between them.

Someone nudges against his side, brushes against his back, there and gone again. To anyone else, it would have been misdirection enough, just a passing body in the crush of the room, but Hannibal knows when his pocket has been picked. There's the weight of something that hadn't been there before. He turns his head to the side, over his shoulder, searching, and sees no one, but catches the faintest, familiar scent on the air and his heart begins to race.

"Excuse me for a moment?" he asks of Alana. "I really must check on the kitchen to see how those tarts are coming along."

Her face falls, but Alana waves him off. Hannibal scans the crowd as he goes for any sign, though he already knows he'll find none. Slipping through the dining room and past the kitchen, he retreats to the relative quiet of the pantry.

Paper crinkles against his fingers, wrapped around a heavy, solid weight. Hannibal pulls it free. His car key falls into his palm, still warm from Will's skin. Hannibal's brow wrinkles in delighted confusion, and he unfolds the paper.

Sorry I had to borrow this, but I left you a gift in the trunk. Don't worry; this one can't fight back.

Hannibal is not a creature of impulse, but it takes all his self-control to keep from going out now, to see what Will has left for him. Will's unpredictability makes it nearly impossible for him to guess at the nature of the gift, whether to ensnare him or for his benefaction. Soon enough the guests will leave and he'll be able to take his time and savour the moment. Alana will be going home this evening after all.

He refolds the note around the key and returns it to his pocket, where the words press insistently against his thigh each time he moves. A reminder of Will's presence here this

evening, and the risk he takes each time he leaves his cell to continue their game. How bold of him, to stroll past Chilton and Alana and Jack.

Hannibal imagines him, an otherworldly presence. Privy to all the private snatches of conversation, able to observe their every unguarded expression. Darting carefully through the crowd, nimble twisting steps to avoid touching, except his intentional graze at Hannibal's back.

No one else would ever conceive of it. Twitchy, anxious Will Graham, always flinching nervously away from attention, fiddling with his glasses, the unpresuming slouch of his shoulders. But Hannibal has seen glimpses of who Will is beneath a lifetime of coping mechanisms. In those moments when he has forgotten himself, comfortable enough in Hannibal's presence to let the mask slip. The confidence in his stride, the easy, economic grace of his movements. How quick and precise when going through familiar, practiced motions.

It is one of many reasons he so longs to see Will, entirely unfettered by conscience and all the unnecessary fears that have plagued him. What he has witnessed in those moments, even before he knew of Will's abilities, of Will's true nature…

Though not entirely unexpected, the simmering, low-grade arousal stirring within Hannibal is inconvenient. Will's scent has entirely dissipated already, but Hannibal can recall it with perfect accuracy. And knowing that Will was so close yet again, enough to reach out and touch. Secret, known only to him. Hannibal pushes it aside, ready to revisit later this evening.

There's a bit of a stir when he returns. Chilton making some fuss by the door, tugging on his coat while talking into his phone, a bit too loudly. Hannibal makes his way across the room. "Leaving so soon, Frederick? You'll miss dessert."

Chilton glances at him sidelong as he adjusts his scarf, expression wary and anxious. "Hannibal. There's been an incident at the hospital."

It is an unfamiliar sensation that grips Hannibal then--peculiar, prickling ice in his veins--at the thought that Will's absence has been noticed. "Nothing too serious, I hope."

"Abel Gideon has gone missing from the medical wing. A guard was attacked, left unconscious in his place, hooked up to the machines." Chilton tugs his collar straight and darts Hannibal a nervous smile. "Forgive my early departure."

Hannibal ignores the pit in his stomach, unfurling to give way to something far more pleasant. "Of course." He smooths his mask in place, smile innocuous with just the right touch of concern. "I do hope you find him quickly."

Alana stays late, lingering even after the last of the staff have departed. She seats herself at the harpsichord, clumsily, charmingly, picking out *Chopsticks* on the keys. Hannibal can see himself taking a seat beside her, letting their fingers play together. Instead he leans against the side of the harpsichord.

“The ending to my composition has been alluding me. You may have solved my problem with ‘Chopsticks.’”

They share a smile, and Alana shifts her attention to his composition, beginning to play with a bit more skill. She leans into the motion of her hands on the keys. “If only all problems could be solved with a simple waltz. Jack's treating you like a suspect. He's pointing fingers in the dark.”

“Perhaps after this evening he’ll finally change his tune,” Hannibal says.

Alana arches a brow. Her hands rest on the keys and she looks up at him. “You know something I don’t know?”

“Abel Gideon was taken this evening. Given his history, the FBI would be remiss not to consider that this is the work of The Chesapeake Ripper.”

Of course, this changes his own plans. The row of fastidiously made fishing ties, meant to be left with the guard when he took Gideon were meant to tie the Copycat to the Ripper, and seal Will’s innocence. Without them, certainly it will be Jack’s opinion that the Ripper was responsible, but there will be no tangible evidence to free Will.

Thankfully he hasn’t rushed his current work with Mister Isley. With a few tweaks, it could work just as nicely. When Jack follows the diatom trail, he’ll find all he needs alongside Miriam in the cabin.

“I hope you’re right. I hope you can finally leave Will’s accusations behind once and for all.” She stands and moves closer. “I’d like for us to leave it all behind.”

It is no fault of Alana’s that she has imagined a different ending to the evening than he now has in mind. Hannibal will bear the responsibility of her disappointment far more easily than he might Will’s wrath--though what a breathtaking sight that would be.

Hannibal takes Alana’s hand in his own, patting it in a decidedly paternalistic manner. A line mars her forehead, lips pursed in questioning, though Hannibal speaks before she can. “Your presence has been a crutch, these past months. I must thank you for standing by my side throughout these trials, despite the emotional distress it has caused you, to see Will like this.”

He sees her out and she goes hesitantly, offering to help finish up with the tidying, then stands looking adrift on the front stoop, as though some mistake has been made. Once she has driven off, Hannibal goes out through the back garden to the garage. Locked up as tightly as before, no sign of any intrusion. He presses the button on the fob to open the trunk.

Even knowing, with near absolute certainty, what he would find in the trunk, Hannibal’s heart still gives a lurch at the sight of Gideon, unconscious and bound, stuffed inelegantly within.

“Oh dear Will,” he breaths. “How ever can I thank you?”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry again for the long breaks between chapters. I've learned never to anticipate how long it's going to take, thanks life. HOWEVER, the original version of this chapter ended up getting bumped back when I shuffled around some plots, so it's actually mostly finished. Just some editing, so it should be posted before the weekend is out!

Chapter 8

“My little brother is obsessed with this video game where he can freeze time, turn invisible, transmute matter.”

Will didn’t really sleep, and he spent most of the morning with Chilton picking his brain, and his afternoon doing his best to ignore Miggs who’s been moved into Gideon’s old cell. As such, Beverly’s opening volley takes him off-guard, when she plops herself down opposite him with a shoulder bag discarded haphazardly on the table top.

There’s a guard standing just inside the door--Chilton isn’t taking any chances after Brown had to separate them last time, particularly given the intervening events with Brown.

Since Hannibal’s visit, Will hasn’t had any others. No one can prove he was involved with Brown’s attack on Hannibal, and Brown isn’t talking. Still Chilton gave him a long lecture about how, if Will ever hopes to be released, he’s going to have to eventually own up to his crimes.

Will’s a little surprised Chilton let Beverly in at all, but he must be hoping to overhear something on the microphone. He gives her a look of warning, but Beverly isn’t fazed. She pulls a folder out of her bag and slides it over to him.

“That’s about the only way I can explain how the Ripper pulls off the shit he does,” she says. “Murder wizardry. Seems a lot less crazy than it would have last week.” Beverly leans back in her seat with her arms crossed over her chest and an expectant look on her face.

Inside the folder is a series of glossy photos taken in an endless, empty stretch of parking lot, interrupted only by the tree that has been installed there. The branches are covered in delicate cherry blossoms heralding the start of spring, and have been carefully woven in and around the skin of the legs, torso, and arms. Knowing Hannibal, Will wouldn’t be surprised to learn that they’d actually been grafted.

“Sheldon Isley, Baltimore city councilman. Transplanted into the parking lot he helped pave over a songbird nesting ground.”

A bundle of flowers spills forth from the chest cavity. Vibrant yellow and red zinnias, soft purple hyacinth fading into blue, white star-shaped blooms, and between them waxy green leaves of mistletoe with milk-coloured berries.

“Apparently asphodel carpets Hades, according to Jimmy.” Beverly rolls her eyes. “Hyacinth means *sport* or *game*. Zinnia for remembrance and mistletoe for surmounting difficulties.”

Of course, she’s missing the full picture. Many flowers have multiple meanings, but even if she got them all right, how could she know? This message wasn’t meant for Beverly or Jack. It’s for Will. Despite what he witnessed in Hannibal’s kitchen, Will has been gripped with what he feels to be warranted suspicion, given all that has passed between them, but Hannibal’s message is clear.

Asphodel expressing his regret for what he's done to Will. The zinnia, an answer to Will's question *does my absence haunt you*--a resounding *yes*. Mistletoe requesting a cessation of fire, a truce between enemies. And the hyacinth--an invitation to join Hannibal's side. A gift in return of those Will has sent him.

Will can't allow his thoughts to stray very far, not with the memory of Hannibal's hand stroking his cock still at the forefront of his mind. He closes his eyes briefly and pushes it aside. "I'm sure there's plenty to be said about the road to hell and paving paradise, but the flowers are just window dressing. There's something else, something you'll find in the lab."

"It's almost supernatural," Beverly says, "how you do that." She's got a smile toying around her lips, but her eyes hold a shadow of resentful anger that gives Will pause.

"Something within the councilman." Will flips through the photos, considering the effort Hannibal must have gone through. How long must he have kept Isley alive to make sure his work took. The damage to his feet and legs from being submerged for a length of time before his death. Nothing Hannibal does is ever by accident, none of it incidental. "Or perhaps the tree itself."

"And the game he's playing with us?" Beverly prompts.

That is the question. Hannibal must have known Beverly would come to Will with these photographs, as she'd done before. What response does he anticipate from Will?

"It's been a game with him from the beginning. Creating the Copycat in the first place, Miriam Lass' arm, seeing me locked up in here." Even now Will can't help the bitterness that seeps into his voice at the words.

"Then why did you bench me?" Beverly's voice is a whispered hiss. "While you're rotting away in a cell, he's out doing…" She gestures at the spread of photographs. There's a war going on inside her, and Will feels the blame for his part in it. Driving her after Hannibal and now reigning her in. The confusion and mistrust and her sense of loyalty pulling her apart. "I told you I'd go to Jack, if there was another body."

Will sucks his bottom lip in, keeps his face carefully blank as he shakes his head. Eyebrows raised just slightly to make him all the more unassuming. "You have to do what you have to do, Beverly. I'm in no position to stop you."

Disappointment flares briefly in her eyes, before the cold anger sets in. "But," Will continues, tidying the stack of photos and placing them back in the folder. "I'd stick to the cold, hard facts. I doubt Jack would be interested in any flights of fancy."

Beverly's movements are smooth and precise as she rises and packs away her things. None of the jerkiness Alana exhibits in her rage. It's all simmering beneath the surface in Beverly. Dangerous, unknown depths. She turns to look at him with a sneer tucked in the corner of her mouth, and for a second she's going to speak, but then she just turns and leaves without a word.

Will has no lab, no samples to test, none of the information that Jimmy and Brian and Beverly will likely be presenting to Jack in the morning. Whatever message Hannibal has hidden in the roots of that tree is beyond him.

He considers this, throughout the day and early evening, ignoring the orderly who comes with his dinner tray and takes it away again untouched an hour later. Will sits on his cot, legs crossed neatly, head tipped back as he wades through the stream in his mind. All the details he's never noticed before now draw his attention.

It's grown dark, a murky, overcast twilight, with fog on the surface of the river rolling out thick through the trees. Sparks of light out of the corner of his eye, that dart quickly from tree to tree and wink out of existence when Will turns to look at them head on. Spindly-legged creatures in the far distance, moving slowly in and out of sight, never a clear view of them between the leaves and branches and undergrowth.

As he walks against the drag of the current, Will is reminded of the feel of passing through solid matter. The sensation like sand and sediment passing beneath his skin and spilling forth from his fingertips, shaken from his shoulders, streaming from his eyes and nostrils and mouth and ears. It's an oddly satisfying, almost soothing sensation. All the stress bleeds away with it, leaving Will feeling slack and deflated.

The light dims the further upstream he walks. In among the singing of crickets and the toad song, Will catches snatches of whispers--too faint to make out the words, and besides, he knows intuitively it's not a language he'd understand even if he could.

Quite suddenly, there is a path to his left, trees illuminating one after the other with indistinct, glowing orbs of light. Will takes the invitation. The path is lined in bluebells and vivid purple foxglove, and beneath his bare feet, satiny lamb's ear coats the ground.

It sparks a memories long forgotten, of being led by his hand through the forest, as his mother named off the plants and all their properties. Stroking lamb's ear against his cheek to his giggles, weaving the bluebells into chains as they rung out their delicate, tinny sound. They harmonised beautifully with his mother's singing, though Father never seemed to hear the bluebells ring. He'd shake his head over Mom's nonsense when she'd lay the finished garlands around Will's neck. *Remember,* she'd whisper in an undertone only for him, *someone draped in bluebell can't tell you a lie*.

Witches thimbles, she'd called the foxglove, the time they'd found them growing wild near the stream behind the house. Will couldn't have been more than four, and the memory had been buried deep ever since. Mom kneeling to pluck one of the little cup-shaped flowers and dipping it in the stream, then offering it to Will to drink.

"If you drink from their flower, no one will make a fool of you," his mother explained. "But never let your father drink from it, or any of your friends. It can raise the dead and kill the living."

Will had taken it from her unquestioningly, and never felt any ill-effects, stopping there for a drink from the flowers whenever he walked by the stream in the forest. Aside from the tingling that spread throughout him from head to toe, there hadn't been any noticeable

change, but the time his father caught him doing it, he'd smacked the flower from Will's hand and raced him to the hospital.

Curious now, spurred on by an almost irresistible impulse, Will bends down to pick one of the flowers, the cup filled with dew. He closes his eyes and brings the flower to his lips. The sensation is just how he remembers, pins and needles under his skin, sweeping through his body. It's there and gone again in a matter of seconds, and Will is left feeling clear-headed and rejuvenated.

He opens his eyes, and stands within an ancient, ramshackle cabin. As he turns in a circle, Will tries to reconcile this place with his memories, but comes up short. There's a strange tree stretching towards the ceiling. Moonlight streams in through the high windows, bright on the orange bark curling back to reveal patches of green, and delicate white flowers drooping from the branches.

For some reason, Will can almost imagine the tree in Hannibal's office--it wouldn't look out of place there. And for just a moment, he's there, instead, in that familiar space. Even now, Will takes comfort in the scent of leather and books, in the cool light of the windows casting strange shapes over Hannibal's face. He waits for Will in his normal chair, expression placid, with the dreamlike drift of flower petals on the air between them.

"Why would you bring me here?" Will wonders, more to himself than his conjuring of Hannibal.

"I have no control where you roam," Hannibal says. An unknowable expression in his eyes, and the faintest smirk on his lips. "You won't be lead around by the nose."

Will shakes his head in rueful humour. Not anymore, anyway, though he doesn't doubt Hannibal would try it again, if he thought he could get away with it. He turns his back on the office and takes in the details of the cabin.

"This place isn't for me."

Hannibal hums his agreement.

Will walks among the stainless steel tables with their surgical instruments and lighting. Rows of glass panes and empty jars with clear tubing. His vision flickers and blurs like an old VHS, and he sees Beverly before him, neatly sliced into segments pressed between the glass, her blood in those jars, but then he blinks furiously and it's all gone.

All throughout the drafty cabin are the signs pointing to its owner. Cherry blossom clippings from Isley's tree, fishing lures nearly identical to the ones used to frame Will, and the remnants of crimes with which Will is familiar, though he's never tied them to the Ripper before. Only here in his subconscious is does he finally connect the dots.

A sound downstairs catches his attention. Probably a rat, scurrying along the floor, and yet Will makes his way to the padlocked door. The lock is new on an old, rotting door. Easy enough to loosen the screws with a few blows of a nearby 2x4. Too easy. It's all just for show.

Hannibal's brand of theatricality. He reminds himself that this is not meant for him to find, but that doesn't stop him from descending the stairs.

There are two raised cisterns at the bottom of the wooden stairs, and Will is drawn to the second. He stumbles over the edge of the first in his haste to reach it, goes down on his knees to grab the handles and gives a firm tug. A horrible screech of protest, metal on metal grinding, and then all the air leaves his lungs in a rush.

Miriam Lass looks up at him, eyes searching the darkness and seeing nothing. She's dirty and shivering from the cold, but beneath it's clear she's been well cared for. Not unhealthily thin, no visible signs of bruising or injury other than her missing arm. But there's a vacant look in her eyes that Will can identify with, stuck in a dissociative fugue.

Should he be shocked to find her here? Why would his mind conjure Miriam, of all Hannibal's victims? But really, who better to utilise in this moment, when Jack is already uncertain about the direction his investigation?

Will knows how deeply Jack's guilt runs, how it still gnaws at him daily. When he unravels Hannibal's riddle, he'll find his way out here, with all the evidence of Will's innocence, and still no answers as to the Ripper's identity. Certainly Miriam will be unable to point a finger at Hannibal. No, that's not the game he's playing here. This will cement Will's innocence and provide the side-benefit of driving Jack closer to the edge.

Even in his imagination, Will can't bring himself to leave her this way, trembling, confused, and terrified. He finds a heavy blanket and a telescopic ladder tucked away under the stairs, then lowers himself into the cistern.

Miriam backs away, hand pressed to the stone wall. Her eyes dart uncertainly between the empty space and the ladder. "Don't worry, Miriam," he says, voice low and soothing, as gentle as with the most skittish stray. He lays the blanket over her shoulders, marvelling at how real it feels--the rough texture of woven hair against his skin, and Miriam's shakey short breaths.

"Jack will be coming for you soon."

The room ripples and bleeds around him. Sinister shadows sweep in to swallow them both in blackness. It's dizzying and disorienting, and when Will can see again, he's back in his cell gasping for breath, like he's just broken through the surface of a ice cold lake. Like stepping back within his own skin after being lost too long outside of it.

It feels as though a part of him is still in the cold dark with Miriam. Her fear is a sick pit in his stomach. If Will had any idea where Hannibal was keeping her, he'd be out of his cell in a minute, to set her free for real, Hannibal's plans be damned. Miriam's only crime was her poor luck at being in the wrong place at the wrong time. She deserves more than to be used as a tool against Jack.

Early morning light has begun to creep down the stairs. Down here it never manages more than a sort of dull, rippling grey that reminds Will of being underwater. Trapped and on

display in Chilton's aquarium. Too late now for him to leave the cell before the hospital wakes for the day. He has to swallow back the frustration at his own impotence.

Jack is good at what he does Will reminds himself, despite his own situation and the derision he’s felt towards him. He will find her.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

> Just a warning that the ending of this chapter might seem a bit abrupt. I ended up with an over 9k chapter and decided, given that most of the chapters have been under 3k, that it makes sense to split it up into two. The next half is finished already, but it needs a bit of editing. I plan on uploading it over the weekend.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With the FBI working on Sheldon Isley's forensics, it is only a matter of time before Will is exonerated. Hannibal's mind wanders at the most inopportune moments, when the seat across from him is occupied by patients who are not Will. Just how their reunion will go is a mystery, and one that Hannibal takes great pleasure in anticipating.

Two days have passed, without Will's presence in his home. Hannibal checks to the cameras to be sure and is unsurprised to find no sign of Will on them. He has never found himself wanting for patience, but he must admit he finds himself awaiting the stirring of the air that does not come, as Will's scent slowly dissipates from his bedroom.

Once Will is freed, how will he proceed? Will he continue with his little game, moving unseen through Hannibal's life as he rearranges the details? Or will he confront Hannibal headon? Look him in the eye as he casts aside all of Hannibal's careful planning, heedless of the consequences.

The tests will likely come back the day after tomorrow, narrowing down the search to the precise location where Miriam lies in wait. As eager as he is to dine with Gideon, still unconscious in the basement, Hannibal must first ready the shed for Jack's arrival. Will's actions have shifted his timetable yet again.

Hannibal drives out in the early hours of the morning to finish the staging of the cabin. Miriam is already safely ensconced, and should survive the mild discomfort for another couple of days. The basement is chilly, but well-insulated, and Miriam is young and healthy despite her ordeal. Still, it wouldn't serve his purposes quite so well if Jack were to find her dead.

The headlights cut a cold beam through the pitch black darkness on either side of the narrow road. Empty for miles in all directions--no one to notice his vehicle or to hear Miriam's screams, if she were so inclined. Unlikely as it is, in her docile state, Hannibal isn't willing to take any chances here.

When the car rounds the side of the cabin, Hannibal's eyes are immediately drawn to the front door, thrown open to the wind and snow. His mind begins to catalogue the possible

reasons. The wind alone couldn't have accomplished the task, and there's no way Jack would have found it already. He considers a hunter coming along the cabin and using it for shelter. Unlikely, given the weather, and this being private land, but not outside the realm of possibility.

If someone has discovered this place, he has already put himself at risk by approaching and now that he is here, he just venture forward in search of answers. There are no tracks in the fresh snow, neither tire tread nor footprint, though that alone is of little reassurance. Outside it's silent save the whistling of the wind. It cuts cold through thick fabric of his coat, finds every sliver of bare skin. Hannibal's gloved hand delves into his pocket and closes around the folding knife there as he cautiously makes his way to the door.

Anyone within will have heard him coming up the drive; there's no point in trying to sneak up on them. The cabin is dark and echoingly empty. Everything is as he left it, Hannibal notes, as he makes a round of the room. Undisturbed save the drift of snow gathered on the threshold that keeps the door from closing properly. No sign of anyone coming or going save the open door.

Yet there is something uncannily familiar scratching at the back of Hannibal's mind as he walks beneath the flowering arbutus menziesii, some whisper of deja vu. The utter emptiness of the place more like a dream than reality. It isn't until he descends the stairs and finds Miriam's cistern open and empty, that Hannibal finally places the sensation. That unease he'd felt in the early days of Will's visitations, when Hannibal had known someone had invaded his space, even if he had no tangible evidence of it.

At the moment there is no time to consider the likelihood of Will finding this place on his own, or what he meant to accomplish by setting Miriam free. On foot, disoriented as she is, it's unlikely that she's come upon another living being, but it is not a risk he can afford to take.

Outside the snow is falling again. Thick, wet clusters of flakes drift on the air, clinging to Hannibal's hair and lashes, melting on the fabric of his coat. At least he won't have to deal with the tedious task of covering his car tracks--nature will see to that. It would be another nail in his coffin where Jack and Beverly are concerned, to find tire treads that match his vehicle's make and model.

Only after he's found his way back to the main road and followed its winding curves back to the familiar 495, does Hannibal allow his thoughts to wander. Is this Will's answer to his proposal? Of all the potential actions Will might have taken, this one never even crossed Hannibal's mind. How could he have found Miriam, even if he'd known she was alive? Why gift him Gideon only to free Miriam prematurely?

There are many questions Hannibal longs to put to Will, outside the confines of the hospital and away from Chilton's prying ears. Every time he believes he's begun to understand Will's motivation, every time Hannibal believes he can predict how things will proceed between them, Will throws another curve ball. Safe in his cell from the ensuing chaotic fallout.

Yes, the time is rapidly approaching for Hannibal to pin Will down and have his answers.

*

There are warring impulses in Will, to confront Hannibal over Miriam's captivity, and to delight in his reaction to Gideon. At this point, there can no longer be any doubt on Hannibal's part that Will is somehow escaping his cell, even if he questions Will's motives. Yet he has not visited, and Will has heard no word from Chilton to indicate Hannibal's interest in doing so.

Of course it's possible that Chilton is keeping Hannibal from him. It's the sort of pettiness Will would expect from him, especially when they have, to his eyes, reconciled their differences. Will can just imagine him listening to their conversations with a petulant pout, planning how best regain the upper hand.

Before his imprisonment, Will was never an impatient person. Too poor growing up to develop any expectations for birthdays or Christmas, with a father that wasn't the sort to reward whining or demands with anything other than a sharp smack to the ass. As far back as he can remember, classmates and coworkers have wondered at Will's apparent lack of excitement or anticipation for anything at all. Being able to see how everything is likely to play out, a resigned anxiety is his most frequent response.

This is a novel experience, spending his days feeling like a caged animal. Pacing his cell, counting the passing of hours by the length of the shadows cast down the hall. There is a tangible absence where Gideon would have been making his sly comments. Will snorts at himself, actually *missing* it, if only for the distraction Gideon provided.

There's no question at all, when night falls, where Will is going. He makes the trip as if in a dream, one minute slipping through the outer wall with that now-familiar drag of stone and dirt beneath his skin, the next arriving at Hannibal's back gate. If he focused, he could remember the steps that had brought him here, but it felt as though someone else had made the journey.

Hannibal is in his kitchen, massaging a blend of spices into the meat on his cutting board. When Will walks in, he has a moment of disorientation, expecting Hannibal to look up from under the fall of his bangs and offer Will a welcoming smile. To ask about his current case and offer words of encouragement and comfort.

Will allows himself a moment to simply watch and be soothed by the familiar vision of Hannibal cooking. He can't help the little swell of pleasure at knowing that few are given a glimpse of this Hannibal, with his sleeves rolled up, dirtied hands, apron tied around his waist. Nor can he stop the jealousy that follows, reminded of standing here watching the easy intimacy between Hannibal and Alana.

Perhaps that's what moves him, to brush his fingers along the back of Hannibal's neck as he passes behind. The touch chases goosebumps up his arm, and Hannibal goes momentarily still, head tilted to the side. Will holds his breath, but then Hannibal returns to the meat he is preparing.

When he turns to place the meat in the baking dish, Will moves quickly forward and grabs the waiting clove of garlic and closes it in his fist, making it invisible along with the rest of

his body. It's a playful impulse that doesn't entirely feel as if it comes from Will, but somewhere outside of himself. A chorus of barely discernible whispers urging him on, laughing at the way Hannibal pauses again when he returns to the cutting board to find his garlic gone.

Will watches the faint wrinkle of his brow and is intrigued. Hannibal is not confused, that much is clear. There isn't even the briefest flash of self-doubt when he shifts gears smoothly and goes to the pantry for another garlic clove. It's a dance, Will moving the knife to a different counter when Hannibal is at the stove. Changing the heat on the stove eye when Hannibal goes to the sink to rinse his hands.

This isn't why he came here—Miriam should be his priority—but it doesn't stop him. Hannibal's lack of reaction is both troubling and exciting, and Will can't help but push harder for the reaction he wants. He spills a handful of salt into the saucepan simmering on the stove and Hannibal's lips twitch with muted annoyance when he tastes it next.

Will reaches out to tug at the end of Hannibal's apron string when he passes by, and the knot comes undone. Before it can even slip to the ground, Hannibal moves, like a coiled snake striking with unerring precision, grabs Will by the wrist. The startled gasp Will makes is audible on the air between them and Hannibal follows the sound with his gaze.

Some animal instinct kicks in, because Will’s arm phases away without any thought or effort on his part, and Hannibal is left grasping nothing but air. Will skitters across the floor, putting the island between them. Hannibal turns slowly. His eyes scan the room and he takes one cautious step then another, socked feet soft on the floor.

Will is hesitant to take another step and give himself away, and just as hesitant to stay put and let Hannibal close in on him. Hannibal rounds the corner by the stove and Will slinks backwards until he’s pressed against the cold steel of the refrigerator. Hannibal looks in his direction, eyes narrowed, and it takes Will a second to place the plunge and rise of his stomach as pleasure. He’s having *fun*.

A huff of laughter leaves Will on an exhale. He clasps a hand over his mouth, but that only draws more attention. Hannibal stalks across the room, weaving between chopping block and island like a predator after his prey. Will slides to the side, past the oven, and Hannibal pivots suddenly, puts on a burst of speed. He manages to catch Will’s upper arm for the briefest second, before Will slips free again.

Will feels along the counter with his fingers, never taking his eyes off Hannibal. Hannibal isn't deterred in the slightest. He surges forward, hips pinning Will in place with enough force that Will is certain he'll have bruises from the lip of the counter digging into the small of his back.

It would be simple enough to sink through the counter and the wall and disappear into the night, but Will has no real interest in escaping Hannibal this time. His heart pounds in his chest. The fear is there now, muted beneath the thrill of expectation. He has to focus on remaining corporeal, to struggle back against Hannibal's hands instead of slipping through them. Hands that seem to know just where to reach.

There's no fumbling on Hannibal’s part, just strong fingers closing, one around Will’s shoulder, one fisting in Will's hair and jerking his head back and up to bring them eye to eye, if only Hannibal could see him. It’s startlingly arousing to think that, in a way, Hannibal does see him, like no one before.

The whispering voices are delighted by this turn of events. They offer up all sorts of suggestions of what Will could do to Hannibal. The arrogance, of thinking that anyone could hold one of theirs down against his will. But the impulse to make Hannibal pay for all he's done with his life has long since faded. There are other ways, far more pleasant, to punish him.

Will shakes his hair free of Hannibal's hold with a thought and lunges. Hannibal meets him with a solid wall of strength, but he goes still when Will's teeth set sharp against the curve of his jaw. He swallows, a wet sound that makes Will's cock jerk against Hannibal's thigh, and says Will's name with a calm, questioning lilt.

In answer, Will bites down. A groan tumbles from Hannibal's mouth and his hips cant forward to press his own hardening cock into Will's belly. Will's body moves instinctively, legs spreading wide in welcome. He drags his mouth lower, over the beginnings of five o'clock shadow that prickles his lips, to set against Hannibal's pulse. Beneath the skin, it jumps, steady and strong. Will breathes in through his mouth, imagining he can taste it—not just the copper tang of blood, but something unique to Hannibal, that essential strain that belongs only to him.

Slowly—so slowly, as if telegraphing his movements so as not to spook Will—Hannibal ducks his head, lowers the point of his chin against Will's cheek and nudges with suggestion until Will gives in and lifts his face to feel the warm gust of Hannibal's breath over his mouth. Will licks his lips in anticipation, watching how Hannibal's eyes flick back and forth over the empty space before him.

Hannibal moves again with that dizzying speed, pulling Will away from the counter and turning, until he has Will bent face first over the island. The voices are screaming at him to fight back, and Will's muscles tremble with the effort it takes to keep from lashing out, hands braced against the counter top.

He lets out a strangled sound of pleasure when Hannibal's hands find his waist and pull him back with a firm yank. He lays himself out over Will's back face tucked into the sweaty curls at the nape of his neck and grinds his cock against the swell of Will's ass. “I thought it would be quite a bit more disconcerting, not being able to see you,” he whispers near Will's ear, and punctuates the words with a nip to his throat.

Part of Will wants to respond, to ask if it would be better if he were to reveal himself, but he bites his lip on the question. Tension runs between them like the surface of a bubble stretched thin, and to speak would burst it. He prefers to see where this will take them, and isn't disappointed by the hot sting of Hannibal's teeth on the curve of his shoulder, the jut of his shoulder blade, the dip of his back. His hands shift from holding Will down to caressing over his hips, thumbs digging into the soft give of muscle at the side of Will's ass. Fingers curving around to grab a handful of flesh and lift up and apart, leaving Will exposed and shuddering at the sensation.

“Have you enjoyed yourself?” Hannibal murmurs, nosing down Will's spine. “Shamelessly leaving your scent all over my things?” A brush of fingertips across Will's hole and he shudders, knees almost giving out under him. He tastes his own blood, lip raw where he's bitten through it. The blood drips clear from is lip and turns red against the counter top.

“I'll admit, *I* have enjoyed imagining it.”

Almost without Will realising, he's reached across the island for oil, but the sound of it opening has Will's full attention. Hannibal releases him, holding him only in place by his hips. It would be easy enough for Will to buck him off, and part of him his tempted to do so, just to see how Hannibal react. The larger part of him is entranced by the sight of Hannibal's fingers being coated in slick oil.

The muscles of his opening clench and release and his stomach roils in anxious expectation of those fingers stretching him open. As if he knows how it effects Will, Hannibal makes a show of it, rolling the oil back and forth in his palm as he warms it, spreading his glistening fingers wide so they catch golden in the light.

Hannibal moves, one hand splayed in the small of Will's back, and Will holds his breath, waiting, until he feels the blunt press of Hannibal's middle finger. He traces the wrinkled ring, sending skittering, shock-like pulses of pleasure down the backs of Will's thighs. It's a tease of a touch, and Will whimpers. He shifts his legs open wider and tilts his ass upward, Hannibal takes the invitation. He doesn't hesitate any further before pushing inside.

Will's breath leaves him all in a rush. He can feel his powers flickering, surging strong at the first pulse of pleasure when Hannibal sinks knuckle deep inside him, then guttering low. He's barely holding on to his invisibility now. What has become second nature now requires all his fast fading concentration to hold onto. Hannibal works his finger in and out a few times, until Will is rocking back in chase of the sensation, little moans clawing up his throat, and then he withdraws altogether.

Before Will can make a sound of protest, he's back with two fingers, stretching Will open. Every time he pushes in, he pauses to rub at the edge of Will's prostate. It's a tease of a touch, never quite as firm as Will needs and when he tries to rock back into it, Hannibal withdraws.

Soon, Will finds himself whining and can't seem to stop. When he glances over his shoulder it's to see the sharp line of Hannibal's teeth bared in a smile, somehow both cruel and adoring. Will leans up without thinking to lick across Hannibal's mouth. Hannibal leans his weight into holding Will down and his free hand runs up Will's back to tangle in his hair again.

Hannibal's kiss is hungrier than Will could have anticipated, from all that he's seen and experienced of Hannibal's control. Even in this, the precise and methodical way he's stretched Will open, as if his own pleasure is an afterthought. But no, Hannibal tongue traces the line of blood from Will’s lip. His teeth catch on the corner of Will's mouth and he sucks, working sensitive flesh between tongue and the point of his tooth until Will moans and opens wider for Hannibal to lick into his mouth.

He's not clumsy—Hannibal could never be clumsy, but there's an urgency now in his touch that verges on the edge of discomfort. A twinge every time Hannibal's fingers pull back and

hook on the thin skin at the edge of Will's hole before shoving back in with a little twist. Will can't keep up with the kiss like this, left panting with his mouth hanging open, his hips thrusting backwards.

"*Hann*ibal," he bites out, the name half-curse, half-plea, "please."

There's the sound of a zipper dragging open and then the head of Hannibal's cock nudges between Will's ass cheeks blindly. Will's fingers curl around the edges of the counter, spine an almost impossible arch trying to get Hannibal where he wants him, rocking up and down. Hannibal's knees press Will's thighs open wider and then he's right there, pushing inside.

Will, braced on his elbows, goes slack beneath Hannibal's weight as Hannibal sinks deep inside with a smooth thrust. His hands skate up Will's sides, and the heat of his touch melts away the liquid cool of his invisibility. Will can actually *feel* the parts of himself that Hannibal touches becoming visible again.

"*Oh*," Hannibal says, pitched low and revelatory. His hips jerk roughly, finally seating himself entirely within Will's clutching heat. Will's skin sparks like static electricity under Hannibal's splayed fingers as he traces skin into life over his ribs and across his stomach. "Magnificent."

There is a possessiveness in Hannibal's tone. Perhaps a sense of ownership, as a painter towards his masterpiece, Will's skin coming to life like canvas at the stroke of a paint-covered brush. Will finds he doesn't mind it, if the arousal curling under his skin is anything to go by. Even still, the whispering voices protest the idea of anyone *owning* one of their kind.

Will rolls his shoulders back, dislodging Hannibal and letting his invisibility fall back in place like a cloak. If Hannibal wants to see him, he'll have to work harder than that. Will turns and grabs Hannibal by the collar of his shirt. They stumble together into the butcher's block before Hannibal lands solidly in the leather chair and Will climbs astride him.

Hannibal's white knuckled grip on the arm of the chair betrays his apparent calm when Will lowers himself slowly to drag his ass back and forth against Hannibal's cock. He leans in, lips tracing Hannibal's cheekbone, to his ear. "I've thought of all the ways to make you pay," Will's whispers, gasping when Hannibal's cock catches on his hole.

"Your methodology is most inspired," Hannibal says, a little breathless.

Knees tucked into the narrow space between Hannibal's thigh and the arms of the chair for balance Will reaches behind himself to grab ahold of Hannibal's cock. "You have no idea," Will chuckles, and he lowers himself just enough to take Hannibal past the tight muscle of his opening. All his breath leaves him on a groan when Hannibal rocks his hips up and thrusts deep.

There goes his control again. Will can see his own arms becoming solid before fading away once more, braced against Hannibal's shoulders. Hannibal reaches out, his hands find the curve of Will's jaw, and he draws him into a kiss. This one slick and slow, Hannibal learning the shape of Will's mouth by tongue.

It’s the most intimate kiss Will has ever experienced, with Hannibal sheathed inside him and the gentle pressure of the points of his fingers grounding Will despite the ephemeral feeling he’s come to associate with his invisibility. Will is shaking when Hannibal parts their mouths and brings his hands to rest on the curve of Will’s hips. His touch encourages Will to move, and once Will begins, he can’t stop.

He’s spent the time since he first visited Hannibal in this form imagining how this would fall out between them. Yet even with his empathy and the profound intimacy they’ve shared, Will couldn’t have anticipated how the reality of it. Hannibal can’t even see him, so how is it Will feels as though he’s been stripped down to the bone, every inch of him exposed?

Painfully hard and leaking, untouched ‘til now, Will’s cock jerks against Hannibal’s palm when he finally wraps his hand around him. His grip is slick from the oil and firm, and his mouth catches the sounds that pour from Will with more of those kisses. Will’s thighs are burning from the effort of lifting himself up and down on Hannibal’s cock, but he can’t stop now that Hannibal’s jerking him off in time to the rough thrusts.

“Let me see you,” Hannibal murmurs against his mouth. He places kisses, soft and reverent down Will’s throat, sucks briefly at a spot that makes Will’s cock leak over his fist.

Hannibal has already seen far more of him than Will would willingly show anyone else. More than he should show someone who’s already betrayed him. “Will,” Hannibal coaxes. He scrapes the top row of his teeth across the spot and sucks again. “Show me.”

Will grinds down on Hannibal’s cock, clenching his inner muscles and grins in delight when it draws a moan from Hannibal. “You can do better,” Will chastises.

That earns him a bite that breaks the skin and a rough thrust of Hannibal’s hips. Will whines in the back of his throat, head back to give Hannibal more room to work. He twines his arms around Hannibal’s shoulder, hands clenched in Hannibal’s hair and holds on.

With a shift of muscles, Hannibal tumbles Will onto the floor on his back and shoves his legs open wide to rock in at just the right angle to make Will cry out. Hannibal’s face is half-hidden by shadow and the fall of his hair. Will reaches up to push it back and Hannibal presses a wet kiss to the inside of his wrist. He finds Will’s gaze with that unnerving accuracy, and Will is struck breathless by the sight of him.

No more of that carefully constructed mask of control--this is a depth of passion Will frankly thought Hannibal incapable of. Another aspect of that dangerous creature he’d seen fighting Brown, but softer, fonder. He rolls his hips over and over, a sinuous, eloquent ripple of his body into Will’s, which opens so easily in welcoming. This is a far more honest discourse than any they’ve had before.

Will tugs at layers of vest and shirt, pulling them loose of Hannibal’s slacks in search on bare skin. Hannibal leans back to help him, fumbling open his belt until Will can shove his pants and underwear down over the curve of his ass and sling a leg over Hannibal’s naked hip when Hannibal pushes back inside.

Grabbing a handful of shirtfront, Will jerks Hannibal in for a messy kiss, off-centre and too hard. He can't think straight, can't focus on anything but the solid weight of Hannibal between his thighs, his cock driving relentlessly hard and deep, his hand stroking Will's cock and how his thumb teases the sensitive spot just below the head.

With every throb of his heart Will can feel his pleasure rising higher, and his control slipping more and more. Rippling between visible and not with every shaky exhale, a little more skin exposed each time, until Will is shaking apart. His orgasm washes over him, making him arch off the floor from the force of it, and he sees the satisfaction spark in Hannibal's eyes.

Hannibal's hand traces over Will's features, down his chin to rest against his throat. With a little squeeze, the slightest warning pressure, Hannibal forces his head back and their eyes to meet. "There you are," Hannibal grunts, and picks up the speed of his thrusts. The force of it drives Will's back stuttering across the tile floor until he reaches up a hand to brace himself against the wall.

Will can see the very instant he comes undone. The last tendril of control slips free and Hannibal drives into him with one more snap of his hips. Then he's coming, head thrown back, tendons of his neck drawn taut, an almost inhuman sound on his lips in the shape of Will's name.

It isn't that Will had any particular expectations regarding how Hannibal Lecter might behave in a post-coital glow, mostly because none of their imagined couplings had been anything other than quick, brutal, and violent. But Hannibal's hold on his throat softens. His thumb hooks over Will's chin and guides him down to Hannibal's mouth for a languorous kiss. Between Will's thighs he rocks side to side, drawing a faint sound of discomfort and even fainter thread of arousal from Will, until he's settled there comfortably.

Will allows himself to relax incrementally, until his arms are legs are more of a cradle for Hannibal's body and less of a vice gripping him. He takes the time to appreciate the weight of Hannibal holding him down and the novel feel of something inside him now that the edge of pleasure has passed. It's strange and not altogether comfortable but he likes it all the same. A reminder of what they've done and the vulnerability of the both of them in this position.

Just because he can, Will flexes his inner muscles and Hannibal moans softly into his mouth. Shifts his hips in threat, or promise. Almost regretfully, Hannibal parts their lips. The expression on his face is almost difficult for Will take--tender and, he doesn't think it's going too far to say *adoring*.

Will ducks his head, gaze flitting to the side to avoid the attention, though he can feel his cheeks going red. "You don't seem very surprised that I'm--" Will stops abruptly, because even now, saying it out loud just seems absurd.

"Enchanted," Hannibal corrects, then punctuates the word with a kiss to Will's jaw. "Enthralled." This time sucking that spot on Will's throat to make Will whine. "Is it an extension of your empathy, or the other way around?"

Will hums noncommittally, but Hannibal is having none of it. His fingers are gentle but insistent, bringing Will's eyes back to him. "What are you?" he asks, almost to himself. Will

kisses him to avoid the question, and Hannibal allows the distraction.

“How long will you stay?” he asks, between kisses, and the reminder of where Will is and where he’s *supposed* to be is sobering. It’s also the reminder of why he’s here now. He sits up, pushing, and Hannibal rolls off him.

“We need to talk.”

Hannibal arches an expectant brow, and somehow manages to look every inch the professional therapist Will has come to know from their sessions, despite the fact that he’s half naked and his cum is leaking out of Will’s ass. Will struggles with the urge to go invisible again, and instead staggers to his feet. His body is making known its varied protests to his recent activities, primarily anal sex for the first time on his back on a hard tile floor. Hannibal holds out a steadying hand as he follows, and catches Will by the elbow when he sways.

This isn’t a conversation Will planned on having while naked. He feels vulnerable like this, which is almost laughable given what has just transpired between them. “Do you have something I can wear?”

Hannibal takes him in head to toe and Will refuses to squirm or cross his arms over himself. “Or I can just disappear again,” he adds testily.

Chapter End Notes

Basically, these two didn't want to stop screwing all over the place, so. Yeah, there's a lot more of that to come...

Chapter 10

Hannibal leads him to the guest room and leaves him to shower. The air is thick with all the questions burning unasked on Hannibal's lips, and Will is thankful for the reprieve, momentary though it may be. He still can't quite put into words what it is he does, even in the safety of his own mind, let alone speaking the words out loud, and to someone like Hannibal no less.

Will means to be quick, but after the weeks in hospital, the heat and the water-pressure of Hannibal's shower feel like heaven. He finds himself standing under the spray for an indeterminate amount of time, just luxuriating in how the spray feels against his skin, the pleasant twinge in his thighs and ass. When was the last time he felt so relaxed and at ease in his own skin? It's the scent of roasting meat that draws him from his thoughts, and his stomach expresses interest with a grumble. Of course Hannibal wouldn't allow the events of the evening to deter him from his cooking. Will shakes himself free of his stupor and soaps up.

On the bed Hannibal has left pair of pajama pants and undershirt both just a size too big. The robe is unbelievably soft and warm, and similarly over-sized, so that Will’s hands keep slipping back in the sleeves. He should probably feel ridiculous, but as with all the ways that Hannibal has come to represent safety and security to him, being wrapped up in his clothing is much the same. He catches a glimpse of himself in the free standing mirror by the door, the bright spots Hannibal has left on his throat standing out like beacons on his pale skin.

Will probes the tender pink and purpled skin and smiles at his reflection. Hannibal's hunger for him in physical form. It feels like being paid tribute. The whispers coil smug and satisfied at the back of Will's consciousness.

Downstairs he is pleasantly surprised to find Hannibal in a similar state of dishabille. Satiny green pajama pants hanging low on his hips and a charcoal sweater that make him look soft, makes Will want to sink his fingers into the fabric of the sweater at Hannibal’s waist and pull him close. The desire settles warm in the pit of his stomach. He should find it sickening, how domestic this all is. He should find it troubling, at the very least, the ease with which they fall back into a comfortable rapport. Will knows now just how dangerous Hannibal Lecter is. How is it that all the stress and concerns that have plagued him bleed away in Hannibal's presence?

“You wanted to talk?” Hannibal asks, when Will is seated, as he pours them both a generous glass of wine.

Will considers the plate before him, and the mystery meat that smells absolutely heavenly, dressed in a red sauce over a bed of root vegetables. Hannibal watches him, nothing particularly expectant, but Will still catches the approval in his eyes when Will takes the first bite. He keeps waiting for the guilt and revulsion, every time he tastes Hannibal's cooking now, but it never comes.

“I wonder if it’s worse, knowing the name of the person I’m eating, or pretending I don’t.”

Hannibal shakes his napkin loose and places it neatly in his lap. “You have never been able to fool yourself, even for your own comfort,” Hannibal says. “I don’t see why you should start now.”

Will toys with the next piece of meat on his fork. It’s fall-apart tender. Maybe thigh? Or something from the back, near the ribs? Not Miriam, then. Will takes a bite and follows it up with the wine. The flavours together are rich and gamey, sweet plum on the nose with a hint of smoke, and black pepper on the finish. "It's good," he says, which is an understatement and they both know it, but Hannibal looks like the cat that caught the canary. "You are full of surprises tonight." *How about another one then?* Will smirks into his wine. “We need to talk about Miriam Lass.”

“Ah,” Hannibal says. He pauses with his fork resting against his plate, gaze fixed somewhere in the middle distance. “That one threw me for a loop, especially after you were so helpful with Abel.”

Will’s eyes narrow at his lack of reaction. “What do you mean?”

“If it is your intention to steer the FBI’s suspicions away from me, and my intention to see you free of your cell, it might be to our benefit to work together," Hannibal says. "There are better ways to achieve our goals than simply turning Miriam loose prematurely.”

As much as they’re both inclined to leaping from one connection to the next in their conversations, Will’s never lost track like this before, as though he’s missed a step. It is jarring enough how Hannibal has taken Will’s invisibility in stride. How could Hannibal know that Will knows about Miriam at all, let alone that he wants her freed?

“Miriam Lass isn’t some weapon for you to use against Jack, or a tool to fix your mistakes,” Will snaps. “Her only crime was being clever enough to notice what Jack and Alana and I failed to see.”

Hannibal is quiet, chewing his food and taking a sip of his wine before speaking. “Where does personal responsibility end and circumstance begin? Is Abel Gideon a remorseless killer deserving of a bloody end, or is he a victim of brain chemistry?”

“This isn’t going to devolve into a discussion of ethics,” Will says. “Why Miriam is more deserving of life than a mass murderer.”

“You could have killed me at any point in time," Hannibal points out.

Will’s eyes fall closed. A rueful little smile tugs at the corner of his lips. “What do you want me to say, Hannibal? That Abel Gideon is obnoxious, or a pretender to your throne, which are both true but hardly matter in the end. What matters is that he’s dangerous to us both. That’s what it comes down to. That Miriam matters not because she’s innocent in this, but because of what she means to Jack.”

“Or that you deserve to die for everything you’ve done to Jack, to Miriam, to me, to however many bodies you’ve got trailing along behind you--” Hannibal watches, knowing, but eager to hear the words from Will’s lips. Will sees no point in denying it. “But that doesn’t matter, either, because *I want you*.”

It's less an admission and more a statement of fact. One that gives him power over Hannibal, clear as anything in the way Hannibal’s eyes flare at Will’s words. They catch red in the low lighting, the look of a starving man led to feast. “And if Miriam were a danger to me?”

“You’ve managed to flaunt your crimes under the nose of the FBI without the barest whiff of suspicion--even when I accused you. Do you expect me to believe that you’d risk Miriam being found if there was the slightest chance she’d name you as her captor?”

“It is true,” Hannibal allows, lips twitching as he tries to rein in his smile. “Though I didn’t expect her to be found quite so soon.”

“I don’t--Jack found her?” It’s not possible, not when Will just saw her last night. Someone would have told him. Jack wouldn’t have been able to keep himself from visiting, desperate for insight only Will could provide.

There’s a queer look in Hannibal’s eyes, curious and delighted and somehow triumphant. “You don’t know. What you’ve done. Tell me, Will, how did you know about Miriam?”

The skin at the back of Will’s neck prickles like someone has brushed their fingertips there. “I--I had a dream. Or. I don’t know, a vision.” It sounds so ridiculous, especially sitting here across from Hannibal.

Hannibal clearly wants to press for more on the topic of visions and invisibility, but he refrains, for now. “And in your vision, what did you see?”

Will recounts the events, haltingly at first, but with a growing confidence playing off Hannibal’s expression. He’s getting it right, every detail of the place, from the tree with its drifting petals to the collection of trophies, and the cisterns in the cellar.

“I told her Jack would find her soon, and then I woke up.”

Hannibal strokes a thoughtful finger across his lips. Even with more pressing matters to discuss, it's a distracting gesture. The bruises on Will's neck throb at the memory of those lips on his skin. “Have you considered,” Hannibal asks, "that it was not a vision at all?”

Will does consider it, now, the corridor in the forest of his mind and the whispering voices, the darting shadows in the distance. And this evening, finding himself at Hannibal’s home without much thought as to how he’d arrived. “Are you saying I let her go?”

“I’ve always found you to be refreshingly unpredictable, Will,” Hannibal says. “Far be it from me to admonish another to practice more caution--”

Will laughs outright at that, a quick burst of honest amusement that makes him feel lighter. How many other minds had Hannibal toyed with before his own, throwing the chips and

letting them fall where they may? “It’s only fair, turning the tables.”

Hannibal catches him off-guard, another of those lightning quick movements showcasing just how dangerous a predator he must be. He leans over the table palm to Will’s cheek and fingers threaded in his hair. Their lips meet, Will’s still parted to speak; he makes a contented noise instead, against the soft swell of Hannibal’s bottom lip, tasting of truffle and cilantro.

They’ve barely begun to unpack all there is for them to discuss, but Will shifts in his seat, and the slide of satin across his skin reminds him of what he’s wearing and why. Hannibal’s teeth find the sensitive inner flesh of his lip, grazing gently. The sensations work together to set a fire under Will's skin. He stands and the table is in his way, and then it just isn’t anymore, he’s moving through it.

Hannibal’s hooded eyes follow him, and he stands to seize Will around the waist as soon as he’s solid again. It should be unnerving, the way Hannibal’s gaze studies him like a particularly interesting specimen. Given Hannibal’s proclivities, it should send Will running, not make his arousal flare higher at the sight.

Even having had Hannibal fuck him, there’s something thrilling about Hannibal’s hands on him now. The way one hand slides down to cup Will’s ass, bunching up silken fabric when he kneads the flesh. Such a brazen, uncharacteristically vulgar gesture coming from Hannibal Lecter and it has Will’s cock filling up with blood to nudge against Hannibal's thigh. The edge of the table digs into the backs of his thighs, precariously close to Hannibal's forgotten plate. “You think we might make it somewhere more comfortable than the dining room table?” He means to tease, but it comes out breathless, because honestly Will doesn't care where they end up.

“You tell me,” Hannibal says. There’s a lightness around the corner of his eyes. “Who managed to travel from your cell to the cabin and back again with little more than a thought. Who keeps finding your way back here.”

“I don’t know how I do it.” Will runs his hands along the smooth fabric of Hannibal’s sweater, studying the knit to avoid looking him in the eye. If Hannibal wants to discuss what Will is capable of, he's going to be waiting a long time. “I just thought about what you were planning.”

Hannibal is patiently expectant, and Will heaves a sigh and closes his eyes. It feels like a challenge, and Will is not going to be the first of them to blink in this game. He thinks of Hannibal’s bedroom, with its blue walls and ostentatious mirror and Hannibal’s scent. The space between here and there, down the hallway and up the stairs. The next thing he knows, there’s the press of the mattress against the backs of his thighs and their weight tips him sprawling over the comforter. His eyes fly open in surprise to meet Hannibal’s, whose expression is utterly undone.

“I’ve been meaning to thank you,” he says, voice so low it sends a tremor through Will’s body. His hands on the waistband of Will’s pajama pants are a question, which feels unnecessary given the way they’d come together in the kitchen. But that Hannibal is asking makes Will’s throat go dry, makes him lift his hips and nod his consent when Hannibal tugs the fabric down.

“For Matthew Brown.” The satin slithers down his legs, left to pool on the floor, and Hannibal’s hands, warm and calloused, close around Will’s ankles. “For Abel Gideon.” He pulls Will out flat, spreads his legs open, and Will’s face burns at how exposed he is. His sexual encounters in the past have been mostly in the dark, and drunk, avoiding eye contact or thinking too much about anything but the physical sensation. But he doesn’t struggle against the hold. He doesn't want to hide from Hannibal.

“That wasn’t altogether selfless of me,” Will admits.

“No?” Hannibal kneels on the floor, nose pressed to the soft, ticklish skin of Will’s inner knee. He has to fight the urge to jerk at the touch, muscles fluttering in his thighs when Hannibal lays an open mouthed kiss there. His tongue traces a vein upward and Will’s head flops back against the mattress.

“No.” Will drags a hand down his face. It’s too difficult to concentrate on the thread of their conversation when Hannibal’s hand smooths up the crease of his thigh, his thumb so close to the sensitive skin beneath his sac. “You were going to sleep with Alana.”

Hannibal at least, has the grace not to deny it. His lips brush Will’s cock when he speaks. “You’ve saved Alana at the cost of your own soul.” Will’s spine arches at the first solid touch of Hannibal’s mouth on him, lips closed briefly around the head of his cock with a single, faint suckle. “How noble of you.”

Will reaches down to grab a handful of Hannibal’s perfect hair, silken between his fingers. “Nothing noble about it,” he says, and leads Hannibal down. Hannibal obligingly parts his lips and lets Will guide him, takes him deep until Will’s eyes roll back in his head. “*Fuck*, Hannibal.”

Hannibal hums around his mouthful. He bobs his head, graceful even in this, takes Will deeper with each stroke until he’s all the way down to the root, then closes his lips tightly before swallowing around the head. Will forgets how to breathe. He pulls on Hannibal’s hair, because if he keeps this up, he’s going to cum far too fast, and he wants this to last. The luscious feel of Hannibal’s plush lips, the velvet drag of his tongue, and the wet heat of him. Hannibal pulls off with a slick popping sound that makes pre-cum dribble from Will’s cock.

“Jealousy is a powerful motivator.” Hannibal’s voice, raw though it is, is far too smug for Will’s taste.

Will’s eyes narrow and he lifts his head to pin Hannibal with a glare. “One I hope you have no further intention of employing.” It’s difficult, however, to look very stern with Hannibal’s mouth ghosting inches from his cock, and his fingers coming up to trace Will’s hole. He gasps, and twists his hips, tender still from the stretch of Hannibal’s cock. He's not sure if he wants to pull away or push into the touch.

“Why would I, when I have Gideon in my basement, and you in my bed?”

That isn’t exactly the answer Will’s looking for, but perhaps it’s the best he can hope for from someone like Hannibal. Clever lips wrap around him again, tongue firm against the frenulum.

Searching fingers drift upward to massage his perineum. Will's throat catches at the sensation--less intense than Hannibal's touch to his prostate, but pleasurable nonetheless.

Will gives himself over to it as he's never been able to before. There are no intrusive thoughts creeping up on him as to Hannibal's intentions--those are perfectly clear. No question of Hannibal's interest in him, in the worshipful stroke of his hands on Will's skin, the way his eyes catch Will's and won't let go when he swallows down Will's cock, so Will can't help but see the depth of Hannibal's desire.

Nor can Will ignore what else lies there, the emotions he's avoided putting a name to in himself, never mind entertaining the notion that Hannibal might feel them. Now laid bare and almost suffocating in scope. Between that and the feel of Hannibal's mouth on him, Will can't catch his breath. It only serves to make the pleasure that much more intense.

"Hannibal!" Will gives a rough tug to his hair in warning when he draws close. He would expect to last longer especially having already come once, but Hannibal knows what he's doing far too well. "*Fuck.* Your mouth."

Hannibal chuckles, and the sound of it is warm and wrecked from Will's cock down his throat. Will groans at the sensation when he draws back long enough to suck two fingers in his mouth. Hannibal presses a kiss to his thigh before sinking them inside Will with a slick twist of his wrist. His thumb rubs firmly against the spot where his fingers curl inside, against the bundle of nerves within.

Will's legs shake from the wave of pleasure that racks through him. His body bows forward from the strength of it, hot waves rippling through his stomach. Then Hannibal's mouth is back on his cock with that glorious suction. Will collapses back to the mattress, both hands pulling hard on Hannibal's hair when he comes. Hannibal's throat works around him. He gives a slow rumble of pleasure as he swallows down each pulse, until Will is nothing but a shaking, nerveless heap on the bed.

When Will opens his eyes, it is to Hannibal grazing kisses along the crease of his thigh, gazing up at him from beneath his lashes. Will makes his hands loosen their grip, and lets his fingers stroke through Hannibal's hair instead of tugging. "I suppose I should say you're welcome?" he mutters, and grins when Hannibal delivers a sharp nip to his hipbone.

Hannibal doesn't stop there. He leaves a trail of stinging bites across Will's stomach and up his chest, to end at the spot on his neck where Hannibal has left the biggest bruise. Will reaches for the hem of his sweater and Hannibal draws back enough to let it be pulled up over his head and arms before leaning down to seal their mouths together. His cock is a hard line against Will's stomach. There's already a damp spot on the fabric of his pants when Will strokes over the shape of him and gives a squeeze that makes Hannibal grunt and flex his hips.

Will's never *wanted* somebody. It's almost frightening how much he does want Hannibal--to not be drawn along, caught up in someone else's lust for him, or just looking for physical release in someone who's attractive, but to feel as if he can't get enough of the feel of Hannibal's skin under his hand, or the way Hannibal moans his name when Will finally gets a hand down his pants and wraps it around his cock. He wants every part of Hannibal, in every

way he can have him, to hear his name on Hannibal's lips when he watches him come.

To be the only reason for his pleasure the voices whisper, even as a more rational corner of his mind recognises how dangerous the thoughts are. *Your lover* one whispers, followed by another, *Your slave.*

You'll make him do anything for you.

Will sits up. “Roll over--let me--” Hannibal obeys, taking Will with him by the hold on his waist. Will sits up, straddling his hips, one hand splayed on Hannibal’s shoulder for balance as the other strokes carefully up and down Hannibal’s length. “Do you have--” Will trails off, remember the fancy lube he found in Hannibal’s bedside drawer, and reaches for it now.

“Have you gone through all my things? Do I have any secrets left from you?” The words have no heat, not when Hannibal’s eyes are so soft and fond.

Will jerks Hannibal's pants down his hips just enough for his cock to spring free. His chest tightens pleasantly at the sight of it, thick and long and graceful like the rest of the man. Oh, part of him wants to climb up on his knees and take Hannibal inside again, to ride him until they're both aching and dripping with sweat. Equally as compelling is the desire to hold Hannibal in his hand and watch what he can do with just this simple touch. He dribbles the lube into his palm and over the head of Hannibal’s cock, gathers it and smears it down the length of him. “If you do, you’ll tell me,” Will says. He slicks his fist up and back down and gives a squeeze.

“All your plans for me, for Gideon.” The foreskin eases back beneath his fist to expose the slick purple head of Hannibal's cock. Under Will's gaze Hannibal twitches and a thick dribble of pre-cum pulses out. “Whatever you have planned to frame Chilton.”

Hannibal's lips part on a question, but Will doesn’t give him a chance to voice it. He wriggles down and bends his head to lick across the slit of Hannibal's cock. He's not sure what he expects from the taste, but oh, he likes it, the flavour of Hannibal on his tongue makes him groan, if only for the proof of the effect he's having. “Will I?” Hannibal finally manages.

Will hums agreement, experimenting with how it feels to press his closed lips against the head of his cock, parts them just enough to suckle the tip. “You will,” he says around his mouthful. “If you want my help convincing Jack.”

He trails his mouth upward over the slight dip of Hannibal’s stomach, still jerking with his right hand as he explores how Hannibal responds to his lips over the curve of his ribs, or the fingers of his free hand curling in the thatch of grey hair on Hannibal’s chest. “If you want me here instead of a cell.”

“I suppose I can't argue--ah--” Hannibal jerks beneath him when Will closes his teeth around one nipple a bit harder than necessary. “--with your logic.”

Will wants to keep exploring, but when he looks up, he's distracted by the desire to kiss him. Will lifts his chin and Hannibal dips his head to meet him. He could get lost in Hannibal’s mouth, in the give and take between them, the same easy give of Will’s body for Hannibal in

the way Hannibal parts his lips for him, tilts his head back and lets Will lick him open. Will knows without having to ask that Hannibal would give the rest of himself as unquestioningly, too. He loses any sense of rhythm at the thought of working his cock into Hannibal's pliant body, and the sounds he might coax forth. There's no finesse to the rough jerk of his hand on Hannibal’s cock, as desperate for Hannibal to come as he’d been for his own pleasure.

When Hannibal does come, Will’s moaning right along with him in sympathy. Echoing after-shocks of pleasure skip down his spine and pool there liquid-warm. Will keeps stroking him, chasing the sensation in his own body, until Hannibal grabs his wrist in a painful grip and holds him still. Will laughs into his mouth and Hannibal’s teeth find the spot where Will bit through earlier, and reopens it.

The whispers are back then, warning not to give that part of himself away so easily. But Hannibal slicks his tongue over the spot and pulls away with red lips, and the thought of denying him anything in that instant is impossible. A curious expression flickers over Hannibal’s face, and he kisses Will again. Slicks his tongue over the spot before sucking hard. Whatever it is he tastes has him pulling back to stare at Will in blatant wonder.

What are you, he'd asked.

“We still have to talk,” Will says, to forestall whatever Hannibal might ask. Even if Will had the answers and were inclined to be truthful, and he’s not sure Hannibal’s earned that yet. Hannibal threads his fingers in Will's hair and kisses him, lazy and searching, until the creeping tension recedes again, and then keeps kissing him, until Will relaxes down against him, letting Hannibal take more of his weight.

Hannibal rolls them until Will is cradled in the nest of memory pillows at the head of the bed. The thought of returning to his cell is torture, when he could be here, learning the shape of Hannibal's mouth with the sleepy-sated swipe of his tongue. When Hannibal pulls away, Will makes a sound of protest and reaches out to stop him, but he rises from the bed and crosses to the en suite. Will's eye catches on the bedside clock and he lets out a sigh. How has so much time passed? It's after one in the morning, and they've barely talked at all. “If Miriam is out, it’s only a matter of time before someone finds her," he calls out.

“It has changed the time table a bit,” Hannibal agrees. “I had planned for Jack to find her at the cabin, and along with her, the evidence of your innocence, though if he is to find her first, I imagine his priorities will change.” He returns from the bathroom with a warm washcloth.

“Loathe though I am to spend another night under Chilton’s care, the longer I stay there, the better it is for us both.” Will lets Hannibal wipe his hands clean and press a kiss to his knuckles. He rolls his eyes and pulls his hand back to his chest, huffing to cover for the pleased blush on his cheeks. “Best alibi I could hope for.”

“Should I ask *how* you know about my plans regarding Chilton?” Hannibal asks. He nuzzles Will's jaw, draws the lobe of his ear between sharp teeth with the flick of his tongue.

Will shudders at the hot-cold tingles along his jaw and scalp. “I didn’t read your mind, if that’s what you’re implying,” he says. “It makes the most sense, and I’m in a unique position to--”

Somewhere far away Will hears two voices speaking. The words are muffled, but as they grow closer, Will hears his name and the jingle of keys. The whispers press urgently in the back of Will's mind, urging him into action. "Someone's coming," he says.

Without any effort on his part, Will can feel himself fading. Hannibal's hold on him tightens, but it slips through Will's skin, and then Will is back in his cell. He shivers at the change in temperature, skin bare under the thin layer of his blanket. It's just in time. The yellow circle of a flashlight passes over him, and Will holds up his hand to shield his eyes.

"What's going on?"

One of the guards--Thomas, respectful but not friendly--taps the flashlight once on the bars. "Doctor Chilton has us doing extra rounds. Doesn't want any more incidents like Gideon."

Will waits until they've passed on to the next cell before flopping back on his mattress. This will make things a bit more difficult. He closes his eyes, and as the after impressions of the flashlight fade, finds himself standing at the edge of that path in his mind.

Fairy-light flickers among the trees and when he steps forward, several of the lights dart out to meet him. They mirror his movements when he reaches out a hand. The points of light dance around his fingertips without touching.

"You brought me back." The lights dip low and flare high. "Thank you."

"We take care of our own," the voices whisper back.

Chapter 11

For all his eagerness to experience Will's abilities firsthand, it is difficult, sitting alone in a suddenly empty bed, to accept what has transpired as anything other than a complex fantasy. The light in the room dips lower in Will's absence. That is not some shifting perception, but an appreciable difference in both the intensity and quality of the glow of the fireplace.

The number of questions Hannibal has for Will is rapidly growing out of hand. Better, perhaps, not to question it at all. Will's discomfort had been clear in how he withdrew whenever Hannibal expressed curiosity. Hannibal could soothe that anxiety with acceptance for now. There would be plenty of time in the future to learn more, once Will let down his guard.

For now, there was much to be done in preparation of his next visit. Though practicality urged caution, there was no plausible reason to doubt Will any longer. He knew very well of Hannibal's involvement with Miriam, and now Gideon. They were fast approaching the point of no return. If Jack were to come tonight on Will's urging, he would find all the evidence necessary to catch the Chesapeake Ripper. If Will were to wait any longer to spring the trap, he would be complicit in Hannibal's actions.

Maybe he would prefer a more personal revenge.

Oh, but there was no mistaking the affection in Will's touch. Whether playful or passionate, there was an intensity that Will couldn't have feigned. As much as Hannibal gave himself away with his gaze, Will couldn't help but give a bit of himself in return.

Yet another set of plans haphazardly discarded in the wake of Will's declaration. *I want you*. Vague ideas of winning Will over through manipulation, turning him against Jack, rewarding him with Abigail. No, Will won't be led along any longer. He has shown himself to be an equal in every way, and that deserves an appropriate response from Hannibal.

Never before has Hannibal been desirous of a partner, in any aspect of his life. Others have been entertaining distractions, but they have no place in his orderly design. It is startlingly easy to see Will at his side, his chaos winding through Hannibal's carefully laid plans. What's more, it's enticing to him. Enough to settle any stray doubts over the next course of action, at any rate.

Gideon is the most important piece of the puzzle in framing Chilton. If and when Miriam is found, she will be the final nail in his coffin, but Gideon will be enough, especially with Will's assistance, to clear both their names.

Best go prepare him, in that case.

*

Frederick is waiting to greet Hannibal personally after he makes his way through security. "I'm sorry for all the extra security. Since Gideon was taken things have been...difficult."

“Do you have any leads on who might have taken him?”

Frederick gives him a long, dubious look. “The cameras didn’t pick anyone up entering or leaving the premises,” he says after a brief silence. “Jack Crawford has shown a particular interest in his disappearance, but so far they’ve turned up nothing.”

“I’m sure Gideon made more than his fair share of enemies over the years,” Hannibal observes.

“Oh, yes, certainly.” Frederick lifts his brows in agreement. “In particular, he’s shared some interesting conversations with Will Graham over the past few weeks. I’m guessing he’s why you’re here, though I have to say I’m a bit surprised.”

Clearly there is more he wishes to say on that subject, but is unwilling to do so. The stench of fear wafts from him when he glances at Hannibal side-long from the corner of his eye. “I don’t know if I can function any longer as Will’s therapist, but he needs a friend now more than ever.”

“Is that what the two of you are, now?” Frederick asks.

There are many reasons that Frederick is Hannibal’s choice for scapegoat, prime among them the fact that he is both far too insightful for his own good, and dreadful at knowing how to use that knowledge. “Will you allow me to see him?”

“Oh, far be it from me to get in the way of friendship,” Frederick says, with a grandiose sweep of his hand.

It is a sign of good-will, Hannibal to see Will outside of his cage. There’s no doubting that Frederick has seen the truth in Will’s accusations where the others fail to, and hopes to avoiding becoming his next meal. Will is brought into the little glass room in nothing more than wrist cuffs, perfunctorily cuffed to the table, and then they’re left alone.

“I don’t know if Chilton actually trusts me with you, or if he’s hoping I’ll finish what Brown started,” Will says, giving the chains a little tug. Even without his abilities, there’s enough give to make him dangerous if he were so inclined.

Will is a tempting vision, and he knows it. He tips back his head when he catches Hannibal looking, showing off the ivory column of his neck dotted in bruises. What must the orderlies think of those? Yet Will has made no effort to cover them.

“I would like to think that if you were going to kill me, you’d be more circumspect about it,” Hannibal says. Will’s lip twitches at the corner, just briefly. His eyes are sparkling, and it has never taken much will-power on Hannibal’s part to resist temptation, but he must physically restrain himself from leaning across the table just now to remind himself of the taste of that mouth.

Will lets the grin blossom full and mischievous. “Oh believe me, Doctor Lecter, I’ve imagined a thousand ways to get my revenge on whoever put me here, and not a one of them involves *me* in restraints.”

Hannibal graces him with a faint smile in return. “You look well-rested?” he says, the upwards lilt questioning. It had been impossible not to worry after such an abrupt departure.

“You don’t. Burning the midnight oil?”

“There is a project that has demanded a great deal of my attention, procuring the proper ingredients for a special meal,” Hannibal says. “I only wish that you could join me in enjoying the fruits of my labour.”

Will shrugs. “Anything would be a step up from the what they serve us here.” He shifts and leans forward as if any secret he might impart would actually remain as such. “Do you want to know what I miss more than your cooking? The company. Having nothing to entertain me but Abel’s endless monologuing should be considered torture--I pity whoever has taken him, if they haven’t just killed him already.”

“I suppose I should be thankful that my company is preferable to that of Abel Gideon.”

“And the cooking doesn’t hurt,” Will allows, gazing up from under his lashes. His eyes are a peculiar pale green in the light of the room, and sparkling in delight. He all the more beautiful in his happiness, otherworldly, utterly out of place in these drab surroundings

This lighthearted exchange is refreshing deviation from Will’s usual irascibility. Is it a temporary result of circumstance, or a more permanent change--an acceptance at last of what has lain dormant beneath a borrowed sense of morality? “I look forward to cooking for you again, soon.”

“Soon? Your belief in my innocence is hardly going to move Kade Prunell,” Will says. “She’s a force to be reckoned with, and all she wants someone to blame for this mess, clean it up, and move on as quickly as possible. Right now I’m the most convenient option.”

“Jack seems to think whoever is behind this recent spate of killings, is connected to the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“I have no doubt of that, but why would he show his hand now?” Will asks.

“I imagine he put all these wheels into motion with some end goal in mind,” Hannibal says. “Perhaps he’s finally achieved it.” He manages not to react outwardly to the brush of Will’s foot against the inseam of his trousers.

Will’s brows are raised in amusement. “Do you really think so?”

Hannibal relaxes the tension in his legs, letting them fall open for Will’s meandering exploration upward. When he darts out a tongue to wet his lips, Will’s gaze tracks the movement. “He wouldn’t have taken Gideon if he weren’t confident of the outcome.”

“Yes, the Ripper would never allow someone to provoke a reckless reaction from him.”

Hannibal smoothly moves a hand from the table top to reach beneath, and grab Will’s ankle. There’s a warning in his grip, but Will looks unrepentant. With no effort at all, Hannibal’s hand is empty again and Will is smirking.

“If you’re right,” Will continues, “I suppose we’ll see soon enough.”

*

Frederick is obviously perplexed from listening in on their conversation, when he walks Hannibal out, watching him as though he’s begun to put the pieces together but can’t believe the conclusion he’s drawn. With Gideon gone, there is no one left to corroborate his accusations, save Will, and even if Jack were suddenly willing to listen, Will is no longer in their court. He almost feels sorry for Frederick.

After his ten o’clock appointment, Beverly Katz is in his waiting room, avoiding eye-contact with Margot Verger. She’s tapping a folder against her thigh and her eyes narrow when Hannibal walks in. “Miss Katz. I have an appointment now, though I’d be happy to speak with you after.”

Margot looks between the two of them, eyes lit up with amusement and curiosity. “I don’t mind waiting. It’s not like my issues are going anywhere.”

Beverly looks around his office with the eye of an investigator when Hannibal lets her in. Similar to Will and Jack’s own initial exam of the room, but shrewder. Rather than looking for clues as to his character, she’s searching out the one detail to prove his guilt. She slaps the folder down on his desktop, and Hannibal raises a curious brow.

“The results from our tests on your hundred dollar hors d'oeuvres.”

If she was hoping for some reaction to give him away, she’ll be disappointed. “Did Jack find what he was looking for?”

“I’m starting to understand how it must have felt for Will,” Beverly says. “Everyone around him second-guessing when he’s the only one who knows what the hell is going on.”

“Feeling guilty, Miss Katz?”

“Anyone with a conscience would be, for their part in Will’s incarceration.” Beverly’s eyes are piercing, every line of her tightly drawn body an accusation. Yet she maintains a casual, almost friendly tone of voice despite it. “All I can do now is my best to get him out.”

“Then you and I are aligned in our motivations,” Hannibal says.

Beverly snorts. “You know, I can’t help but think how *convenient* it was, Gideon disappearing into thin air,” she snaps her fingers, “right in the middle of your fancy party, with Jack and Chilton and Doctor Bloom as your witnesses.”

Hannibal grants her a humorous expression. “I hope you’re not suggesting I managed to be in two places at once.”

“Believe it or not, I’ve heard of stranger things,” is all she says.

“Forgive me, but unless there’s something more pressing, I really should see to my appointment now.” Hannibal gestures to the back entrance, and Beverly pauses in her perusal

of the room to size him up.

“Of course.” She smirks. “I’m sure your patients need you more than I do.” She nods her head in the direction of the folder. “There are some photos from the Isley case. It looks like the killer left behind trophies from previous victims with this one. We’re still waiting on DNA, but Jack is curious for your insight, when you have the time.”

Had Beverly arrived with her questions and accusations only a few short days ago, Hannibal’s path would have been clear. Now it is impossible to pretend he doesn’t know what Will’s reaction would be to losing Beverly. He has apparently forgiven Hannibal for what he believes has become of Abigail, but for him to take Beverly as well might be a step too far.

From the moment they staged Abigail’s death, Hannibal’s plan has always been for them to leave the country together, though under what circumstances remains to be seen. At one point in time, it seemed there was little chance that they might leave as anything other than fugitives from the law. He certainly hadn’t considered Will’s eager participation in the framing of Frederick Chilton.

There is a way for them to emerge unscathed, to live a life free from suspicion, where they won’t have to constantly look over their shoulders. Such a life would not trouble Hannibal, but Will would no doubt prefer a less stressful existence. Killing Beverly might be the straw to break Jack Crawford’s back, or it might fuel his desire for revenge on those responsible.

*

“I apologise," Hannibal says, as he carefully adjusts the iv line providing Gideon with medication. "Dinner will be served late this evening.”

Gideon’s gaze is unimpressed, the barest curl of a sneer at one corner of his mouth. He makes a tsking sound. “And after all I’ve heard of your hospitality, I must say I find it sorely lacking.”

Hannibal’s lips twitch, threatening a smile. He finishes working Gideon’s arm through the hole of his housecoat and rehangs the iv bag. “I do hope you’ll find it worth the wait.”

“It’s not as if I’m going to be walking out on you, if it’s not,” Gideon calls after him, when he leaves the room.

The clay is baking in the oven; it’s been in long enough for the scent of the roasting meat to mingle with that of the clove and thyme, and the sweetness of the red wine cooking off. There is no guarantee that after last night Will will be able to leave the hospital tonight, but Hannibal sets him a place. It would be nice to have someone who might honestly appreciate the effort he’s gone through with this dish.

Abel keeps dragging his hands over the brakes on the wheelchair when Hannibal brings him to the table. Under different circumstances, Hannibal might find himself growing annoyed. As it is, he grants Gideon a beatific smile when he begins to whistle off-tune, and pours the wine. “Normally I wouldn’t recommend a patient mix medication with wine, but I think a single glass will be fine.”

“Am I your back-up plan, Doctor Lecter?” Gideon asks, with a wave of his hand to the empty plate. “Were you stood up?”

“You are my guest of honour tonight, Abel,” Hannibal tells him. “I wouldn’t dream of excluding you from the dinner for which you are the main attraction.”

Hannibal ducks into the kitchen for the platter that holds the roast. When he enters the room, he can feel Will’s presence a moment before a hand tucks in the small of his back, followed by the press of Will’s body. His breath stirs the hair on Hannibal’s neck.

“I wasn’t certain you’d be able to make it.”

“And miss the opportunity to see Gideon receiving his just desserts?” Will comes to stand before Hannibal, hand trailing along his waist to rest on his hip, bleeding into view. He remains unfinished around the edges, a blurry watercolour, through which Hannibal can see the background of the kitchen. When he reaches out to cup Will’s cheek, it is solid even where there is no visible skin.

“And Chilton’s extra measures?” Hannibal asks.

Will’s eyes go unfocused, all his attention suddenly far away. “I might have to leave early, but it’s fine for the time being.” He blinks and meets Hannibal’s gaze. “Frankly I think Frederick has bigger concerns, after your visit this morning. I didn’t know it was possible for him to be more paranoid.”

“I took the liberty of laying out some clothing for you.” Hannibal draws the back of one hand down Will’s bare chest. “Though if you prefer to join us as you are…”

Will pushes Hannibal away with a smirk, disappearing once again as he does. “Give me a minute.”

“Rôti de cuisse. Clay-roasted thigh and canoe-cut marrow bone,” Hannibal announces, as he returns to the dining room with the tray.

“There you are,” Gideon drawls. “I thought I might actually expire before you served dinner, and I’m not speaking hyperbole.”

“You needn’t worry, Doctor Gideon,” Hannibal says. “It may have been some time since I practiced surgery, but I assure you I’m equal to the task of keeping you alive and kicking.”

Gideon’s lips press thin in displeasure. “At least as long as it serves your purposes.”

“You still have much to give,” Hannibal says. He sets aside the clay roses that decorate the top of the roast. “I love cooking with clay. Creates a more succulent dish and adds a little theatricality to dinner.”

“Yes, because you’re certainly lacking in that department,” Gideon mumbles. “Prometheus fashioned man out of clay and gave him fire.”

Hannibal taps the hammer against the clay. It splits easily with that sense of satisfaction from having done a job well, revealing the roast beneath. “We come from clay, return to clay.”

Gideon lifts his brows. “Ashes to ashes, and all the rest?”

“Shall I carve?”

“You already did.”

It is a rare person who can take their fate in stride so well as Abel Gideon, all thing considered. A shame, that Gideon became intertwined with Will’s fate, and Chilton’s. Hannibal can’t help but wonder what he might have inspired in Gideon, were he to allow the man go free and further wreak his brand of havoc on the world.

“Your legs are no good to you anymore,” Hannibal says. “You've got a T-4 fracture of the vertebra, this is a far more practical use for those limbs.” He pierces the roast, and the meat is tender and fragrant.

Gideon leans forward to peer at Hannibal’s handiwork. From his expression, he appears unimpressed. “Hard to have anything, isn't it, Doctor Lecter? Rare to get it. Hard to keep it. A damn slippery life.”

“We can only learn so much and live.” Hannibal slices the meat into thin slivers, each perfectly pink. “The irony is, life is full of lessons.” He lays the slices on Gideon’s place, first, then Will’s and his own.

“So is death, apparently.”

“You were determined to know the Chesapeake Ripper.” They both look up when Will enters. “To wear that skin before you die. Now is your opportunity.”

Hannibal greets him with a smile. “You took the words from my mouth.” He must entertain the possibility that Will is reading his mind, even if it isn’t intentional. Once such a notion would have been beyond even Hannibal’s imagining, but Will is constantly readjusting the lens through which he perceives the world.

“And what skin are you wearing, currently, Mister Graham?” Gideon wonders. Rare to see him wrong-footed, and Will clearly takes pleasure in it, from the unguarded curling of his lips as he takes his seat across from Hannibal.

The suit Hannibal chose fits Will well, despite the weight he’s lost over the past weeks. For now he’ll defer to Will’s style: salmon coloured button down with brown corduroy, though he looks forward to dressing Will in much finer things, once he is free. Will has made an effort--he can hardly show up in his cell tomorrow freshly shaved, but he’s slicked back his wild mane of curls and trimmed his beard.

“I think it’s safe to say I’m finally comfortable in my own,” he says. “Mm, you smell delicious, Doctor Gideon.”

There is a long moment of silence, Abel looking between the both of them with a languorous blink. “What’s the matter?” Will asks. “Speechless again?”

“Doctor Lecter, I must inquire after the drugs you’ve been using--are any of them hallucinogens?”

Will rolls his eyes, attention shifting back to Hannibal. “I know how you must enjoy this opportunity to play with your food, but between Jack, Beverly, and Chilton, it’s bold even by your standards to keep him here.”

“Beverly came by just this afternoon in fact,” Hannibal says, and the words are barely past his lips before Will’s demeanour changes entirely, from relaxed and amused to simmering with potential violence.

“What happened?”

“She made several barely veiled accusations, helped along no doubt, by information you provided her.”

Will curses under his breath. “I told her to stay away from this. Whatever it is you plan to do, I think we can both agree that expediency is more important than entertainment.”

Gideon was meant to last days or weeks, as Hannibal slowly picked him piece from piece. He has the recipes set aside, has purchased all the necessary ingredients for the fanciful feasts he has in mind. That was before Will put himself back in the game in the most spectacular fashion. If he must sacrifice his plans with Gideon to secure Will’s freedom, so be it.

“I’ll move him to a safe house tomorrow, if it will put your mind at ease,” Hannibal says.

Will is mollified, temporarily at least. “How you were never caught before now is a mystery to me.”

“I suppose I’ll just count my lucky stars that you came along, then,” Hannibal says, and is rewarded when Will’s cheeks colour.

“I don’t think it’s what Jack had in mind, when he originally put us together.”

“You know,” Gideon says in a conversational tone, “I hate to be the third wheel, as it were. I’d be happy to leave the two of you to your date.”

Will’s lips pull into smirk, and he doesn’t look away from Hannibal as he cuts through the meat on his plate and selects a small morsel. “There’s no reason not to enjoy your last meal; we can stand your company a little longer, Abel.”

Gideon picks up his fork and knife consideringly and pulls a face. “How does one politely refuse a dish in these circumstances?”
“One doesn't,” Hannibal says. “The tragedy is not to die, Abel, but to be wasted.”

Will takes the first bite, and Gideon says, “Three words, Mister Graham. Creutzfeldt–Jakob disease.”

Will's eyes flutter closed as he follows it up with a drink of his wine. He holds it in his mouth a moment before swallowing, and hums appreciatively. "How does one choose the perfect pairing for human meat? I can't imagine there are many sommeliers making recommendations on the subject."

Hannibal basks in the tacit praise. How far his Will has come to this place of acceptance. "Of course there are many factors to consider, from the cut of the meat to the sauce, but I've found that there are specific grapes that share a certain affinity with different meats. A full-bodied Rhône or fruity Pinot Noir are almost guaranteed to pair well, regardless of how it's served, but for Doctor Gideon I brought out a bottle of '71 Côtes de Beaune Burgundy."

Gideon takes his own bite and raises his glass in toast before taking a sip. "My compliments to the chef."

Chapter 12

Will has made himself at home while Hannibal returned Gideon to the cellar. He sits by the fire in the study with a glass of 45 year old scotch. It was one thing to know that Will had done so in Hannibal's absence, and another to see it in person. How utterly at ease Will is in his own skin, all the more beautiful in his confidence. He passes Hannibal his own glass and looks at him from over the rim with steady eyes, dark in the firelight.

"Tell me what you had planned."

Hannibal sips his scotch, allows the flavour to warm and blossom on his tongue, before swallowing down the burn. "I believe you know the most of it."

Will dips his head. "I want to hear it. Indulge me."

"They would have found Miriam first," Hannibal says. "Jack should be visiting the cabin any day now, I imagine."

"And there, the groundwork for my innocence," Will muses.

"She would be unable to recall much about her captivity, though enough to exclude me as her captor. Instead, it would be Frederick Chilton's voice in her memories."

"You're so certain of that?" Will says. "I was able to overcome your suggestion."

"I think we can agree that you are unlike any other patient I've encountered," Hannibal says. "Even discounting your abilities. Regardless, Miriam is only one link in the chain. Between her discovery, the contents of the cabin, and the clues left with Mister Isley, Jack will be forced to reexamine the case against you."

Will tilts the glass toward the fire, studying the contents as though they hold some meaning. "Curious thing, isn't it, Doctor Lecter?"

Hannibal hadn't realised until just now, the pleasure he took from hearing his given name from Will's mouth. The intimacy of the syllables caught between tongue and palate, the luxuriant, almost obscene roll of the vowels. He misses it. "What's that?" he asks.

"Love."

Hannibal locks down his expression a second too late, he knows, from the way Will smiles. "I know," Will says, "I've been hesitant to put a name to it myself. To give it *weight*. To consider the possibility that you are capable of genuine human emotion."

The muscle of Hannibal's jaw tightens to the point of distraction, and he forces it to relax with a long, slow exhale through his nose. It is true, that the depth of feeling he possesses for Will has snuck up on him. Teasing at the edge of his awareness with a fondness that is familiar enough, similar to that he feels for Alana or Bella or Jack.

The full extent of it has only recently begun to unfurl. A queasy, disorienting tug that has upended carefully laid plans. Somehow, it is far more unsettling to examine the true nature of his affection for Will than to accept Will's otherworldliness. And that speaks volumes to how completely out of his depths he is in this.

"All the effort you expended to see me locked away, and now, the lengths to which you'll go to see me free again." Will rises to make a slow turn of the room. Thumbing through Hannibal's music collection. "All the time fostering codependency in me, while failing to recognise the effect it was having on you."

Will moves among Hannibal's space with a sense of ownership, an ease that speaks to how often he has inhabited it in Hannibal's absence. The idea of anyone invading his home rankles, an offense great enough that he would not hesitate to kill any other trespasser. Yet in this instance, the sense of intimacy it engenders smoulders pleasantly beneath his skin, stoked higher when Will draws a hand along the back of Hannibal's chair, fingers ruffling the ends of his hair.

"As always, your insight is beyond reproach." Hannibal says.

"Is that your way of declaring your love for me?" Will asks. His tone is teasing, as is the smile on his face, when he settles himself in Hannibal's lap, but there's something harder lingering in his eyes.

Hannibal lifts a hand to brush the curls back from Will's brow and travel down the curve of his cheekbone, pink in the firelight and dusted with stubble. Power radiates from him, unseen, unheard, altogether intangible yet present all the same. The potential for violence, the threat of punishment and promise of reward; it compels him to speak honestly. "I suppose it is, ineloquent though it may have been."

Will's smile widens, warms into soft approbation, finally reaching his eyes. "We're less concerned with how you express yourself than the sentiment behind it."

Intrigue sparks bright within Hannibal at his words. "We?" he echoes.

Oh, Will blithely ignores that altogether, though there is a twinkle in his eye. "So Miriam points the finger at Chilton, and I'm free, and then the authorities find Gideon less a few limbs in his home, which is all amusing, no doubt. It'll distract Jack for a while, but it'll never stand up to scrutiny."

He presses closer to Hannibal while he speaks, arms twined around Hannibal's shoulder, his weight settling comfortably over Hannibal's lap. "He's physically weak, not to mention his inability to digest meat, none of the trademarks of that sort of sociopathy. So tell me, what next?"

"I didn't anticipate the ease with which you tendered your forgiveness."

Will's nails scrape up the back of Hannibal's neck hard enough to sting, and he grabs a fistfull of hair, before releasing his hold and combing his fingers through it. "Don't mistake acceptance for forgiveness, Hannibal," he says. "You have a ways to go yet."

Hannibal nods, a carefully measured gesture. He has underestimated just how dangerous Will is, and won't make the same mistake again. "I was certain you'd come to finish the job you started in Minnesota once they released you."

"Oh believe me, I wanted to, at first," Will says, with a poison curl of his lip. His fingers continue to play through Hannibal's hair, gentle and soothing in counterpoint to his words and tone of voice. "The first time I visited you here, all I could think was how easy it would be, and no way to pin it on me. And even before I imagined the weight of the gun in my hand and the pressure it would take to pull the trigger. The satisfaction of seeing the blood pooling from the wound in your head." He punctuates the words with the tip of a finger pressed between Hannibal's eyes.

"So I come to kill you, and then what?"

"I honestly couldn't have said whether you'd go through with it or not," Hannibal admits.

"And you were willing to risk your life to find out?" Will arches a brow.

Hannibal allows himself to touch, to rest his hands on Will's waist. Reverence for beautiful things is nothing unusual to him, but it feels particularly burdened with meaning in this moment, where Will is concerned. He is aware of Will's benevolence in this, allowing himself to be touched, for Hannibal to convey his reverence through it.

"As you so deftly pointed out, I love you, Will. All I wished was to see you reach your full potential. If it required my death, who was I to stand in the way of your Becoming?"

Will scrutinises Hannibal's face, reading every minute expression, every tell Hannibal isn't even aware he possesses. Reading him, as plainly as though Hannibal's mask, constructed with painstaking care over decades does nothing to conceal him. "No, there's something else you haven't told me yet."

Hannibal smiles. "Then that's two of us."

Laughter bubbles up from Will's chest, cheerful and delighted. "Alright, keep your secret for now." He strokes a finger down Hannibal's cheek, presses his nail into the wrinkle at the corner of his mouth, sweeps a thumb across his bottom lip. "Now about Gideon." He trails off, and like that his attention is elsewhere.

Will rises from Hannibal's lap gracefully and Hannibal has to rush to keep up after him when he disappears down the hall. Through the foyer and dining room into the kitchen, right up to the locked pantry door. Will's hand rests on the handle briefly before he simply walks *through* the door, and opens it from the inside.

It's a very calculated move, to show off his abilities. A playful, taunting reminder of what Will is capable of, and the fact that Hannibal has no idea from whence they came, nor how far they extend. And undoubtedly an invitation to discover the answer to both, in time. He must know that Hannibal is helpless but to follow.

*

The cellar is not how Will imagined--aside from Gideon, there is nothing incriminating here. Maybe Hannibal actually possesses an ounce of self-preservation after all. He's cleared out anything that might point to his less savory hobbies.

Instead the cellar is stocked full of shelves of rare ingredients; jar after jar of preserved peppers of every stripe, exotic fruits, grain of paradise, frankincense tears, mushrooms and various roots.

At one end, Gideon lies unconscious on a hospital bed, hooked up to a machine monitoring his vitals. There is a prep area--slaughtering hooks, spreader, skinning knives and cleavers. Will passes by it in favour of the glass and wire enclosure for a cochlear garden, set upon a raised platform. Inside, the snails are feasting upon a recently severed arm that has been soaked in a dish of wine.

"You just couldn't resist, could you?"

Hannibal doesn't look the least bit remorseful, reading something on the medical machinery. "You're going to deprive me of my guest ahead of schedule," he says. "Allow me a few leftovers."

"I've given us ironclad alibis. Even when they realise that Chilton's been framed, they'll have no way to link it back to us." Will plucks one of the snails from Gideon's finger speculatively. Hannibal probably amuses himself with this little reversal of the food chain-those at the bottom preying on one at the top. "It would be great if you didn't ruin it all because you had to keep a souvenir."

"I can relocate the meat, along with Gideon, somewhere Jack and the FBI will never find."

That sparks Will's curiosity. "Ah yes, your safehouse. Another of your little hideouts like the cabin?" he asks.

No doubt there are more than a handful in the tri-state area alone, knowing Hannibal. Maybe even another prison or two for his victims. It should concern Will more, the idea that there might be others held and kept alive like Gideon and Miriam, locked away awaiting their fate, but he's not troubled. That alone should be all the more troubling. "Will I get to see this one?"

Hannibal comes to stand at his side, a hand on Will's shoulder. "I planned to take you eventually. I imagine it will be sooner, now. There is something there I'd like to show you." He strokes his thumb up Will's neck.

All the touching, to make certain Will is real, and truly there before him. Will can't blame him for needing the tangible, physical evidence, after what he's seen. Will himself spent years discarding the memories from his youth as nothing more than fantasy. He reaches up and takes Hannibal's hand in his, fist closed tight around his fingers, lifts them to his mouth to brush a kiss across fingertips as he turns to face Hannibal.

It's as much about his new resolution to more often give into impulse as to see the effect it has on Hannibal, and of course the effect is pleasing to him. Hannibal's gaze catches and

holds his own, and suddenly all the air has been sucked from the room, the temperature gone from pleasantly cool to stifling.

Will is inclined to surrender to the magnetic tug that pulls him towards Hannibal, as if he is his own source of gravity. Not for the first time, Will considers the fact that of the two of them, Hannibal should be the one with these abilities. Hannibal, so far from human that Will can't even put a name to what it is he sees beneath the mask. But for that cold, unfeeling, alien creature that lurks within, Hannibal said that he loves him, and this Will believes to be true.

The voices, silent until now, whisper to Will now. *Just remember you are the one who has caught him, and not the other way around*.

That, however, is not entirely true, and they must know it. How tangled up in Hannibal Will has become. Not even the loss of Abigail nor Hannibal's betrayal could drive him to cut ties, seek revenge. At least not the sort Hannibal *deserves*.

Will steps in closer, his hand resting on the plane of Hannibal's chest, and tilts his head up to brush another kiss across his mouth. The drag of Hannibal's generous lips is soft, and Will meant to be quick, but finds himself lingering, only parting with a sharp nip. "Do what you want with the meat, take whatever you plan on using," he says. "But I'll take care of Gideon myself, tomorrow."

"Oh?"

"You'll see."

Hannibal's curiosity is lost within his desire, and the voices are pleased with *that.* The way his hands ghost lightly over Will's sides, asking silent permission. The inviting tilt of his head, lips parted close enough for Will to take, rather than taking himself.

Will, on the other hand, misses that thrill of adrenaline when Hannibal pinned him to the counter, rough hands on bare skin. He wants the chase and the struggle and the spark of pain alongside the pleasure. He runs his hands upward to curl around Hannibal's neck, thumb tucked up against his pulse, fingers toying at the hairline.

"You knew when I was in the room, last night and today. No one else can do that. What gave me away?

Hannibal draws a deep breath. "There were times I would catch your scent, or when I felt the displacement of the air with your movements, when it seemed the house itself was breathing." His touch is firmer now, fingers digging into Will through layers of clothing between them, to pull them flush together. The proof of his arousal nudges against Will's thigh.

Will's whole body throbs with a sympathetic heat. His own arousal seeps through his skin sticky-sweet, warm molasses in his veins. It makes him feel slow and heavy all over, centered on the weight of his cock growing harder with each passing second. He draws a ragged breath, already close to *panting* from how much he wants.

“But you knew exactly where to reach for me, and I think. I think when I’m like that, when I…” Will trails off, because how does he put it into words? What does he call it, when he disappears--not only becoming invisible but insubstantial as well. He laughs; it’s the only reasonable response.

“When I dematerialise,” he finally finishes, with a wryly arched brow, “I don’t think I make a sound. I don’t think I leave a scent, but you *knew*.”

There’s Hannibal’s curiosity again, flaring to life. A sharp keenness like a dog pricking up his ears, Hannibal’s eyes darting back and forth over his face, dangerous and wanting. Will has given himself away with his choice of words. Shown just how lost he is, how new and foreign it all is to him, as well.

Will swallows back his anxiety and goes up on his toes to whisper in Hannibal’s ear: “Find me again.” Then he pushes off Hannibal, fading away. The clothing falls from his skin to land in a pile on the floor and Will extends his senses outward, pushing to see just how far he can go--no longer contained by the confines of skin. It is so much easier to just *do* rather than think about.

Hannibal goes completely still. His eyes fall closed, and Will waits, breath jagged. They haven’t even really begun yet, but the sensation is new and startling, when Will realises he’s not quite sure where his chest even *is* or where the rest of his body is in relation, completely without form.

He drifts through the room, buffeting up against the shapes of the things he passes on all sides. The cool, smooth/sharp edge of the glass jars and the grain and whirl of the wooden shelves, the sandy, earthy moisture that seeps through the concrete at his feet. The small sounds the snails make as the eat now thundering, louder than the distant hum and beep of Gideon’s machinery, and the voices are all around, faint and echoing, beckoning Will in every direction.

There is nothing to give him away; not even the rapid beat of his heart for Hannibal to hear, not when he’s like this. For a moment, Will makes himself solid again, just long enough for Hannibal to hear his footsteps on the tread of the stairs. The sensation of snapping back into his own skin is disorienting, as is the feel of the stair beneath his feet--the limitations of the flesh only picking out the superficial qualities and none of the essence of the wood.

Hannibal’s eyes open, and he moves with that single-minded purposefulness that sparks heat throughout Will, spread thin as he is. He hurries up the stairs and through the pantry and kitchen. Steps silenced again but this time Will holds himself more tightly together. Hannibal is on his heels, until Will diverges from the obvious path and takes the long way around the dining room table.

Hannibal continues on a few steps before he stops, sensing that he is no longer on Will’s trail. In this instant, Hannibal is the very epitome of the predator. Eyes dark and intently focussed. The quickness of his breath juxtaposed with the stillness of his body, and the way his tongue teases out from between parted lips, like a snake tasting the air. Every line of his body speaks of deadly potential, from the harsh slope of his brow to the hunch of his shoulders as he turns, slowly and silently, in his socked feet.

A spiky, sickly feeling not unlike fear crawls along Will's skin, thinking of all those who have been hunted by Hannibal in the past. He knows that should frighten him, but it's time to stop lying to himself about just what it is he wants. And what he wants from Hannibal, it turns out, is exactly what Hannibal wants from him: to see and know him for who he is beneath the veneer of civility.

With that thought in mind, Will changes tactics. He phases through the table, fast and light on his feet, and goes solid for a brief second to land a blow to Hannibal's cheek, then immaterial again to dodge the reflexive punch Hannibal throws. Will's knuckles split on Hannibal's cheek, and they're both bleeding. The whispers *really* like that, and before he can think about what he's doing or why, Will goes solid again to reach up and grab Hannibal by his hair and haul him down to lick up the trickle.

Hannibal's hands find his hips with unerring accuracy, nails digging ragged crescents, grip pressing bruises into skin. He doesn't struggle against the hold Will has on him, but wrestles him against the top of the table to roll their hips together. Will hums his pleasure--at the sensation, and the taste of Hannibal. Something more primitive and essential that makes the voices hiss for more.

Will gets his hands flat on the table top and shoves back against Hannibal's weight. It's not enough to dislodge him, so Will cheats, fading through the centre of the table to the far side. His hand leaves a streak of blood there and on the edge of the door frame for Hannibal to follow, when he runs from the room.

This time he stays solid--it only seems fair that Hannibal have something to grab onto--but sends out a thought to silence his footsteps. He isn't sure it will work until it does. Hannibal's own footsteps are muffled on the marble of the foyeur. Each step he draws nearer sets Will's heart beating faster. He takes the stairs two at a time and isn't disappointed to hear Hannibal in pursuit.

What does take him off-guard is the hand on his ankle, the sharp yank that lands him on the ground *hard*. The stairs catch him on the tops of his thighs, across his stomach knocking the breath from him, forearms braced on the landing. It's almost automatic at this point, to escape a hold by fading out, that Will has to force himself to remain solid when Hannibal grabs his other ankle and drags him down a step. Will's elbows skid across the berber, a painful counterpoint to the press of Hannibal's covered cock against his ass.

Hannibal's hands are all over him now, more how Will likes them, rough and demanding. He gives a firm squeeze to the curve of Will's asscheeks before stroke up the line of his back, laying out Will's form through touch. One arm wrapping around his waist, to pull Will close against him, one hand around his throat, fingers digging in under Will's jaw to urge him back.

"You didn't make it much of a challenge." Hannibal's breath stirs Will's hair. His lips ghost along the shell of his ear as he speaks.

Will grinds his ass back onto Hannibal's cock and grins at the groan he earns. "Maybe I wanted to be caught."

Hannibal bites down on his earlobe and flicks it between teeth and tongue. He flattens his palm over Will's stomach and smooths downward to take him in hand. Will hasn't even realised how hard he is until now, so wrapped up in the adrenaline-high, but Hannibal's hand on his cock brings him crashing back down. He bucks his hips forward into the tight grip of Hannibal's fist and back again to his groin.

Some of the tension in Hannibal's frame relaxes, he settles in over Will, tracing kisses over his jaw as he strokes up and down his cock. A sort of confidence from his win. Will turns his head to meet Hannibal's kiss, wet and slow. The soft suck of his top lip between Hannibal's, his tongue tracing the bow of it, and the tease of his thumb over the head of Will's cock.

Then Will slips free, laughter shaking loose when Hannibal falls flat against the stairs in his absence. He lets out a growl and pushes himself up and after Will, who runs ahead into the bedroom. Tumbling onto the bed still laughing, and he's not even sure if he's still invisible or not when Hannibal crashes into him and lays him out flat over the covers.

The laughter dies on a moan when Hannibal reaches between them to trace his fingers against his hole. Will's been thinking about this since he was dragged back to his cell last night. The residual soreness has been a reminder of the pleasure. As much as he wanted Hannibal, he still hadn't anticipated how good it would feel, and how much he'd want it again, but he does, so badly.

"Yes, please," he manages and swallows hard. "God I want you to fuck me."

Hannibal presses his face in the back of Will's neck, breath moist on his skin. "Do you have any idea--" he begins in a rough voice. "Turn over." Will obeys. "Let me see you." There is that same entreaty as before, soft and wondering. Will flushes with pleasure at the sound of it, and consciously wills himself visible again. "Look at you."

"I'd rather get you naked." He grabs at Hannibal's belt, tugs it loose, pulls down his zipper. "You've got too many clothes on."

Hannibal's fingers make quick work of the buttons down his shirt. "We don't all have your skill at undressing via incorporeality."

Will snorts. "I don't think that's a thing." Finally he pushes Hannibal's slacks down over his hips as Hannibal shrugs out of his shirt. Together they get his pants and boxers out of the way, twisting and wriggling, and Will revels in the press of warm skin against his own, the slide of bare legs urging his open.

At the sight of Hannibal's cock, his mouth waters, and Will goes with impulse to wriggle lower on the mattress and take the head in his mouth. Hannibal shudders and pushes deeper, and Will opens wider to take him. He moans around his mouthful, runs his tongue along the length. His own dick throbs insistently at the rush of pre-cum on his tongue.

Will pulls back with another lick across the tip and pushes himself up the bed. Later, when they have more time, he'll take Hannibal apart with his mouth, but right now he wants something different. He spreads his limbs out in welcoming. "Come on, Hannibal," he says, and kicks him on the ankle.

Hannibal spares him a smirk. “Your impatience is flattering.” He reaches for the lube, still out on the bedside table from last night. Will has an image of Hannibal touching himself this morning before coming to visit, as it it were the only way to be sure he wouldn’t succumb to the temptation to touch, and it delights him.

He gets one slick finger in Will. It feels just as tight as it had the first time, but slowly, slowly he works Will open. One knuckle at a time, then a second finger, and then Will’s body begins to welcome it rather than resist, pulling Hannibal’s fingers back every time he tries to pull them loose.

Fuck it feels good. Will lifts his hips to meet the join of Hannibal’s fingers, and it’s still not deep enough. He can’t stop the little sounds, breathy, gasping moans, the *please please please* when Hannibal stops working his fingers in and out and just presses down hard on his prostate with a beckoning motion.

Hannibal runs a hand through Will’s sweaty hair, pushes it back from his face, and leans in to kiss him when his cock replaces his fingers, nudging in slowly. Will opens for him mouth and body, Hannibal licks into him and rocks forward deep.

The slide is so good, the width of Hannibal and the angle just right. He moves with a fluid grace that leaves Will breathless and arching into him. Kisses trailed over his chin and down his throat to the bruise he left on Will’s neck. When Hannibal sucks on the spot, Will’s whole body convulses at the sensation, still tender and over-sensitive. There’s something about the press of teeth against skin, the potential for deadly violence reigned in, that makes Will’s cock jerk and dribble pre-cum.

Will clutches at him, with fingers slipping down the sweat-slick skin of Hannibal’s back until he digs in his nails, gets a nice firm grip to use as leverage and rock up to meet each thrust. He thinks maybe he’ll cum just like this, from the feel of Hannibal’s mouth on him and the drag of his cock over his prostate and the stretched edge of his opening. The pleasure is so different than he’s used to, bordering the line of too much and not quite enough, and he just teeters there.

Then Hannibal shifts his weight to take his cock in hand, firm and slick with lube. Will’s grip slips lower, ragged scratches left in his wake, to grab at Hannibal’s love handles. With Hannibal’s confession of love, there’s an intimacy to it, when Hannibal draws back to watch Will’s face. He’s partially inclined to shy away, to close his eyes, or just maybe fade away under Hannibal’s gaze, but he forces himself to meet it.

Whatever he sees, Hannibal’s lips stretch into something not quite a smile or a snarl, sharp and dangerous. Will lunges up to snag his lip between his teeth, and it turns into something violent, both of them drawing blood in the kiss. Hannibal’s hips stutter and stall, and then he’s coming in a hot rush, cock slamming home again and again.

Whether it’s the sensation of Hannibal’s cock jerking in him, or the knowledge that Will’s the one to have made him fall apart again, the one who keeps reducing Hannibal Lecter to his basest desires and emotions, that’s all it takes for Will to cum, too. It starts low in his gut, his balls seizing up tight, and then his muscles, as he trips over the edge and shoots in Hannibal’s hand.

This is almost better than the sex itself, the lazy, sated sensation that sweeps through his whole body after. Hannibal's turns the kiss gentle again, slow, soothing swipes of his tongue over the cut on Will's lip. Soft, slick suction, the glide of nibbling teeth, counter to the dead weight of his body pressing Will into the mattress. His mind hums pleasantly with low-grade static.

Will has never been on to stick around long after sex. Even if he can turn off his thoughts long enough to get off, they're always quick to come back in the aftermath. All the intrusive impulses and regrets, and an aching hollow feeling in his chest that feels more like a crushing weight at times.

Of course it shouldn't come as any surprise that Hannibal is the exception in this, as in everything else. Will finds himself drifting, pliant in Hannibal's arms when he finally moves, shifting them further up the bed to rest on the pillows and pull up the sheets over them. It's comfortingly warm, silent in a way that it never is in the cool damp of the hospital with half a dozen mental patients down the hall. Will rolls into Hannibal's welcoming arms that close around him and pull close.

Hannibal rests his chin against the crown of his head. "Do you need to go?" he murmurs.

Will shakes his head, rubs his face in the soft hair on Hannibal's chest, breathes deeply of the scent of sex and sweat and hums in pleasure. "Not for a while longer. They'll let me know when it's time."

Tension ripples briefly through Hannibal's frame, the effort of refraining from asking the questions that rise to his tongue. Will lays a kiss against the skin beneath his mouth, and Hannibal lets out a long breath, and says nothing.

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